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A report presented to the British Council of Churches

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Sex and Morality

A REPORT TO THE
BRITISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
OCTOBER 1966

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THE BRITISH NUCLEAR DETERRENT

THE FUTURE OF SOUTH AFRICA

UNITY BEGINS AT HOME

WORLD POVERTY AND BRITISH RESPONSIBILITY

To be published by the SCM Press in 1967

LIVING WITH SEX: THE STUDENT'S DILEMMA
by Richard F. Hettlinger

SEX AND CHRISTIAN FREEDOM
by Leonard Hodgson

YOUNG PEOPLE AND SEX
by Julia Dawkins

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This report is published before presentation to The British Council of Churches at its meeting at Lambeth 25–26th October 1966 and carries only the authority of the working party which produced it.

J. K. L.

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Mr Christopher Driver (Journalist and Author)
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I

INTRODUCTION

THE British Council of Churches at its meeting in April, 1964, resolved, on the advice of its Advisory Group on Sex, Marriage and the Family, to appoint a Working Party with the following terms of reference:

To prepare a Statement of the Christian case for abstinence from sexual intercourse before marriage and faithfulness within marriage, taking full account of responsible criticisms, and to suggest means whereby the Christian position may be effectively presented to the various sections of the community.

The general situation which gave rise to the creation of the Working Party may be briefly described. The teaching of the Christian Church that sexual intercourse should be confined to marriage is frequently attacked as a theory, and widely ignored in practice. There is abundant evidence of a deepening concern to provide a more adequate programme of sex education for young people, and to help parents in the discharge of their responsibilities in this field; and this must aim not simply at teaching the biological facts of reproduction (though this is still less efficiently done than is often assumed) but at expressing and conveying a sane and responsible attitude towards love and marriage in the face of the misleading suggestions conveyed by much popular literature, entertainment and advertising.

The Working Party has been aware that there is a widespread feeling, especially among Christian people, that recent years have witnessed a general lowering of moral standards, and that this is particularly evident in the realm of sexual behaviour. We do not think it is possible, on the basis of the evidence available, either to endorse or contradict this overall judgment. There are indeed social problems of great magnitude confronting us,

but in our view many of the attempts to analyse our present situation are too superficial to be of value. In the first place, it is by no means easy to arrive at the material facts. Government statistics give us an indication of the percentage of marriages in which the bride is pregnant; but not the percentage of marriages in which both partners are virgins. Secondly, it is extremely difficult to gauge the significance of statistics relating to such admitted social evils as venereal disease and illegitimacy. The effect upon the statistics of such factors as immigration, population growth and the use of contraceptives makes the figures an unreliable guide to the extent of sexual promiscuity. There is also the fact that the illegitimate children are in many cases born to couples who have not married, but who have established a stable relationship and cannot, therefore, be described as promiscuous. Thirdly, we cannot at once assume that even quite radical departures from traditional moral standards are proof of moral degeneracy. We should recognize the possibility that some at least of the agents may be honestly conforming to a different code of ethics, or trying to arrive at one in the light of their judgment of new scientific and social determinates. Finally, we may make the obvious point that even admitted sin and corruption in the realm of sex do not necessarily spell moral ruin at large. Morality concerns itself with every part of life and not just with sex. The overt sexual behaviour of men and women, even if it could be fully described and measured, is not the only evidence to be considered in assessing the moral health of the nation.

We find that the need for caution in making general judgments is underlined in the *Schofield Report*[1] which we have been glad to have before us. The introduction to this, the most thorough investigation of the sexual behaviour of young people yet undertaken in Great Britain, says: 'Notwithstanding all the influences to which the young people of today are exposed–greater independence; more money in their pockets and purses; the weakening of family bonds and religious influences; the development of earlier maturity, physically, emotionally and mentally; the impact of modern

[1] *The Sexual Behaviour of Young People* by Michael Schofield (1965). A report prepared by the research unit of the Central Council for Health Education p. viii.

books, television, periodicals–it is clearly wrong to regard our young people as a bored, undisciplined, sex-obsessed generation'. Although, as the Report points out, 'It is impossible to say how the behaviour of today's younger generation compares with that of the past', the judgment is expressed that 'a survey undertaken in the twenties might not have reached results widely different from those of today'. This is an opinion which we share.

We should not wish it to be thought that because we have indicated some of the ways in which the more alarmist assessments of our present situation must be qualified, we lack a real concern. On the contrary, we approached our task with a sense of urgency. But we believe that it is necessary to examine the present situation in depth. Our first duty, we believe, is not to condemn, but to try to understand what is happening.

We have suggested that the situation is not so simple to understand as church pronouncements sometimes seem to indicate. But we believe it is equally true that 'the Christian position' is not so easily defined as many imagine. Underlying much of our modern confusion there is a real uncertainty about what is the proper basis for Christian moral judgment. One evidence of this is the fact that several Christians who were invited to serve on the Working Party expressed either their inability or their reluctance to do so because of the terms of reference prescribed by the Council. One such objection read: 'I could not personally subscribe to the terms of reference which imply that it has already been decided in advance that all sexual intercourse outside marriage is wrong and that the only question is how to substantiate this view and to present it effectively'.

It soon became clear to us that we could not avoid this challenge to the attitude which seems to be implicit in our terms of reference. Can 'the Christian position' be conveyed in terms of specific rules such as 'no intercourse before marriage'? Does the traditional system of Christian morality with its closely knit formulation of judgment on specific matters enable us to grapple effectively with the questions which people are actually asking? On the other hand, does not its rejection in favour of an emphasis merely upon individual motive and spirit provide an insufficient basis for right living?

In the next chapter we point to the diversity of judgment on sexual matters which confronts us in a rapidly changing world. We then proceed, in Chapter 3, to examine the questions about the basis of moral judgments referred to in the previous paragraph. Chapter 4 explores the meaning and purpose of sex in the light of modern knowledge and insights. Next comes a positive statement about love and marriage. In Chapter 6, we submit our views to the test of responsible criticism. Chapter 7 takes up the question of the educational task which our terms of reference required us to study. Finally, we make certain recommendations.

Our Statement is, of course, addressed in the first instance to The British Council of Churches, and thereafter to the member Churches, to whom, we hope, the Council will commend it. In deciding the eventual form of the Statement we have had particularly in mind those who in one way or another are responsible for education. It is obviously quite impossible to produce a document dealing with such complex questions which will be easily readable by all sections of the community, but we hope that teachers, youth leaders and church groups will derive some benefit from our work.

The Working Party held eighteen meetings, four of which were residential. We gratefully acknowledge the help of many with whom we have corresponded during the course of our discussions.

2

A VARIETY OF VIEWPOINTS

OUR first task will be to set out a number of different viewpoints regarding the place and significance of sex in human life. We shall also indicate some of the factors which have produced such a diversity of judgment.

The Church's teaching with regard to sex has been determined for each generation by its attempt to be loyal to the standards of its founder while responding to the best contemporary thought. In its early centuries it was under strong pressure from 'enlightened opinion' to condemn sex altogether, and only succeeded with some difficulty in upholding marriage as an honourable vocation for the Christian rank and file. Some very influential writings on marriage (for instance those of St Augustine) date from this period, and have helped to perpetuate the opinion that Christians regard sex as a degrading necessity which is only tolerated for the sake of preserving the species. It should not be necessary to say that this view is no longer held by any important body of Christians. Most Christians now agree that sex has, or can have, a positive value in promoting happiness and stability within marriage. But Christian opinion is still adjusting itself to the new situation in which contraception makes it possible to separate the 'relational' function of sex from the reproductive, i.e. to enjoy and profit by sexual intercourse, to strengthen mutual affection without having unwanted children. In this new situation some differences of judgment are inevitable.

Three Christian Views

The Roman Catholic Church is commonly thought to forbid contraception. In fact it emphasizes the reproductive function of sex, and forbids those contraceptive methods which in its view directly frustrate it; and this rule excludes those methods which

are at present the most effective. Yet it does not forbid the limitation of families as such; and it recognizes the positive value of sex within marriage, and so permits sexual endearments which do not directly assist procreation. Most other Christian bodies not only recognize the relational value of sex within marriage, but also allow fairly wide liberty in the use of sexual endearments and in the choice of contraceptive methods; though they do not approve of using them in normal circumstances for the total refusal of children. The great majority of Christians hold that marriage is the only state within which sexual intercourse is permissible. A minority are prepared to relax this rule in various degrees, arguing in rather general terms that actions are justified by the motive and temper in which they are undertaken rather than by external standards; or again, are justified if they bring clear psychological benefits without harming anyone closely concerned. In general, however, Christians share a common concern to uphold certain traditional values which are in danger of being lost in the new situation. Their critics commonly accuse them of being too slow to change and call for a more radical policy. But here too there are marked differences of standpoint.

Three Radical Views

The extreme radical position is probably that embodied in Dr Alex Comfort's description of sex as 'the healthiest and most important human sport'. No responsible critic has maintained that *every* manifestation of sexuality is valuable; it is agreed that sexual perversions and malpractices exist. But it is characteristic of this school of thought to claim that far greater toleration is desirable, that deviations from the normal are not necessarily harmful, and that sex can and should be enjoyed at any level. Thus a couple may make it the vehicle of an intense romantic attachment; on the other hand they are at liberty to treat it simply as an opportunity for intense physical pleasure enjoyed between friends. It would seem to follow logically from this position that there is no need to restrict intimate sexual play to partnerships of two persons only (though we are not sure how far this conclusion is actually drawn); and again it would seem

that there need be no objection in principle to prostitution, though it could well be allowed that it is degrading as usually practised.

There is, however, a sharply contrasting radical view. This is that sexual intercourse should be the expression of passionate personal attachment; further, since it is impossible to guarantee the persistence of such attachments, the parties should terminate the relationship if and when the emotional link which produced it decays. It will be seen that this strongly endorses the high valuation of romantic love which is widely accepted by Christians, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries; but does so in a manner which tends to put married love at a disadvantage. Novelists have been fascinated by the contrast between the conventional, tepid or even hostile relationship which is often taken as characteristic of marriage and the passionate spontaniety of unmarried or even adulterous lovers. This treatment, though we think it misrepresents the facts as a whole, clearly contains elements of truth; since there is normally no reason for prolonging an adulterous relationship if the emotional bond has weakened; whereas there are moral, conventional and social considerations which keep even loveless marriages in being.

It is possible to outline a third radical position distinct from those just described. This is mainly influenced by the important role assigned by Freud to sex in the development of human personality, culture and society. Starting from the claim that there is a sexual component in every manifestation of human energy, it proceeds to argue that a healthy and well-adjusted sexual life is a necessity for the proper development of personality and stable relationships. This leads (we think, by a not perfectly logical transition) to the claim that actual sexual intercourse is essential, or at least valuable, for the development of the personality; and thinkers of this school tend to assume that psychological adjustment, harmony or maturity has such overriding importance that unless there is the strongest presumption to the contrary the prospect of it suffices to justify any course of action. Another criterion of value is 'normality'; but this somewhat ambiguous term sometimes serves to convey the suggestion that if a practice is usual it belongs to the 'normal' pattern of human behaviour and is therefore commendable.

The above is not a complete list of possible standpoints, but it may serve to give some impression of the dimensions of our problem. We have distinguished three Christian views, which we might describe as the Roman Catholic, the central and liberal; and three non-Christian ones, which might be termed the permissive, the romantic and the post-Freudian. Obviously there is in practice a good deal of overlapping. Thus the liberal wing of Christian opinion is clearly sympathetic towards the two last-mentioned radical views; some Christians who are not Roman Catholics maintain the old objections to contraception, and certainly not all agnostics take a permissive view of sexual morality.

The Causes of Diversity

(a) *Scientific*

What are the causes of this present diversity of opinion? Our situation has been radically altered by the discoveries of natural science; but there have also been developments in moral philosophy and theology, as well as changes in economic status and social habits, some of which have been proceeding over the past fifty years. A crucial new fact is, of course, the easy availability of effective contraceptives, which offer the possibility of 'sex without children'. Next, the expectation of life has increased and infant mortality diminished, so that the reproductive capacity of the human race now enormously outruns its needs. We are threatened with over-population, congestion and famine, and faced with the dilemma that either efficient contraceptives must be generally adopted or human sexual activity suffer an unprecedented contraction, an alternative that most people would think neither practicable nor desirable. It may be added that it is not enough to make new techniques available; there is a quite distinct social problem of enabling and persuading people, where necessary, to use them. It is through failures in this sphere that not only over-population but also illegitimacy and abortion remain as formidable social evils.

But science has also influenced our thinking about long-standing problems. Anthropologists have shown us the extreme diversity of sexual customs among different races; and this

naturally suggests that there is something parochial in a rigid adherence to traditional Western morality. Again, we now realise that homosexuality and other abnormalities are far commoner than used to be thought. We can no longer regard them simply as wicked perversions. Moreover the rapid appearance of new possibilities and choices has itself reacted on the theory of morals. Scientific progress is sometimes taken quite simply as a criterion of value. It tends to be presumed that every new discovery should be used. And it is much harder to believe that moral rules are fixed and unchanging when the circumstances and consequences of some actions may have altered entirely within a generation.

Psychology has perhaps played a specially important part in the forming of opinion. No-one can question the benefits it has brought in furthering our understanding of human development, improving education and alleviating mental illness. But some of its other effects are more debatable. Thus it has encouraged people to substitute the concepts of fulfilment, integration and maturity for those of goodness, virtue and duty. This may well be a liberating influence; indeed it is a positive gain if the new concepts are used to elucidate the meaning of love, which is the Christian's first duty and ultimate fulfilment. But the new vocabulary is sometimes used to suggest that one's own fulfilment should be one's main concern. The new psychology has also focussed attention on immediate personal relationships, so that we now tend to think of the individual primarily as child, lover, friend or parent, rather than as citizen or creature with responsibilities to society at large and to God. And it has encouraged tolerance, sometimes at the expense of idealism, partly through the suspension of moral judgment which the working psychiatrist finds professionally necessary, partly through the suggestion that moral condemnation springs from a projection of the speaker's own inner conflicts, so that there is now a certain feeling of embarrassment in condemning or disowning any conduct whatsoever. All this, in so far as it leads to the new understanding of human motives, is to be welcomed; but some important traditional values also need to be safeguarded. We may add that psychology, and especially Freudian psychology, has been

generously publicized by modern literature, especially the novel; and here Freud's theories of the influence of sex on personality are often associated with D. H. Lawrence's revaluation of the physical side of sex. It is now generally agreed that sexual matters should be frankly discussed, and probably few would wish to revive the conventions that made them unmentionable. Yet the present permissive climate of opinion means that deviant sexual behaviour is very freely publicized and, in effect, excused.

(b) *Philosophical*

We may also note some developments in the field of moral philosophy which in themselves may seem abstract and technical, but which have become fairly widely known through the medium of broadcast talks. It used to be assumed that moral judgments are comparable to statements of fact; and indeed they often have a similar grammatical form: 'this is wrong' is grammatically similar to 'that is black'. Such comparisons might well suggest that moral judgments have a permanent and objective validity like that of accepted scientific truths: gold is a metal, jealousy is a sin. But as a result of recent advances in logical theory, philosophers are now generally agreed that the grammatical form of a sentence gives no clue to its logical force; and many are now inclined to regard moral judgments, not as statements of objective fact, but rather as avowals of the speaker's own attitude and choices. No doubt one could still hold, as Aristotle did, that the good man's judgments have special authority; but in a democratic age it is easy to make the further assumption that one man's word is as good as another's; and this conclusion is in fact often suggested. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936) did much to popularize the new theories just described, though it offers only a first crude sketch of what has now become a widely accepted position. Here, then, is another field in which new developments have had the effect of throwing doubt on any notion of objective standards.

(c) *Social*

Certain social trends have contributed to a loosening of moral sanctions. British society has long been pluralist, in the sense that it is made up of numerous social classes and sub-groups

whose diversities of opinion and practice, in sexual life as in other matters, make it dangerous to generalise about a 'British way of life'. The difference between today and yesterday lies in the degree to which this pluralism is publicly recognized and tolerated. Modern sociological research, in conjunction with the fashion for frankness and the spread of mass communications, has enabled people to learn—albeit in an impersonal way—more about the habits and beliefs of their fellow-countrymen than they have ever been able to learn before. At the same time, the areas of effective choice in social behaviour have been increased. Teenagers have enough money and freedom to develop their own culture (and associated values) outside parental knowledge and control. Young married couples are more often able to begin their lives together among strange neighbours in strange places, and are compelled by circumstances to evolve their own patterns and values instead of taking them over entirely from the family and society into which they were born.

(d) *Theological*

Theologians have had to take account of all these tendencies; but their reactions have also been inspired by developments within their own field of study. Modern work on the Old Testament, and on the life of Jesus in its cultural setting, has led them to think of human nature as a complex unity rather than a dualism in which the interests of the body inevitably conflict with those of the spirit. This dualistic view, which has powerfully influenced Christianity in the past, is now seen to have no warrant in the Old Testament or in the Gospels; it is therefore natural to emphasise the value of the body as God's creation and as good in its own right. Other results of scholarship have tended to discredit 'code-morality'. In the early years of this century Jesus was commonly regarded as an inspired moral legislator, but this estimate was challenged on critical grounds by Wrede and Schweitzer. The proposition now commonly advanced by Christian liberals, that love is the only rule imposed by Jesus, was put forward by Anderson Scott in 1929, and probably earlier; and the conception of Christian ethics as a 'code' was rejected by Brunner in 1937. Even the Roman Catholic Church

has felt the pressure of modern biblical scholarship as a liberalizing influence on its traditional moral theology. More recently the influence of existentialist writers has led to further emphasis on the individual's unaided judgment. It should no doubt be acknowledged that over this period the authority of Christian morals has declined; fifty years ago it was not unusual to endorse Christian morality more or less completely even while rejecting its dogmatic basis. The disagreements among Christians in their reactions to new problems have probably lost them some support, though there have been compensating advantages from the public interest aroused by the debate. We are by no means disposed to take a gloomy view of the total situation.

So far we have only tried to report on the present position as we see it. Our main task is to set out the factors which we think should determine the Christian moral judgment; and here we shall need to review the relevant facts and also consider the theoretical question in the next chapter; but any reader who finds it difficult to see the relevance of general moral theory might be recommended to turn to chapter 4.

3

THE BASIS OF MORAL JUDGMENTS

WHAT is the basis for the system of sexual morality generally associated with the Christian Church? Is the system to be thought of as valid for all men in all times and all places, because it is deduced from a divine revelation, through scripture and tradition, of man's true nature? Alternatively, is the Christian system of sexual morality a 'dynamic' or 'evolutionary' system which has to be worked out afresh by each generation in the light of their own understanding of Christ, paying due regard to the conditions obtaining in their time and place? These two alternatives give us a striking, but over-simplified, picture of the present controversy over Christian morals as the advocates of the 'New Morality' tend to envisage it. Neither alternative completely represents a position we hold. Nevertheless we have assumed that new knowledge must be taken into account in arriving at a Christian moral judgment; and it could be asked, 'Is this really legitimate? Is not the Church officially and irrevocably committed to the doctrine of immutable moral rules?'

Questions to be asked

In fact we have to deal with a number of separate questions of general principles which we shall try to analyse and discuss. We may distinguish the following:

(i) Does morality derive from God's will or from man's judgment?
(ii) Is morality static or revisable?
(iii) Is it best embodied in rules or ideals?
(iv) Does it bear mainly on actions, or on motives and dispositions?
(v) How much liberty of interpretation rests with particular cultural groups or individuals?

Obviously a full discussion of these complex questions cannot be attempted in this report. However, in this chapter we shall try to clarify the issues involved, using positive arguments mainly for illustrations; we shall then try to indicate in broad outline which types of moral system we think to be tenable.

All Christians will presumably accept, in some form, the view that morality is an expression of the will of God for mankind; and that the divine will was uniquely embodied in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. There is thus bound to be a conflict between Christians and every kind of agnostic or atheist humanist as regards the formal definition of morality. However this conflict need not necessarily extend to the *content* of morality —though of course it often does so. Christians believe in a God who is personal and loving and who wills for each man and woman the most enduring and complete happiness of which they are capable. But many humanists also take as their fundamental axiom the promotion of human happiness; and it may happen that their ideal of human happiness coincides more or less closely with the Christian one. In such cases there will be a considerable measure of agreement on the qualities of character and the conditions of human life that should be sought, even where there is acute disagreement as to the best means of promoting them. To take the obvious instance, many humanists would agree that a contented and stable marriage is a most desirable condition even though they disown the Church's theology and also reject its insistence that marriage is a union for life.

However, the first question posed above is linked with the others. Thus humanists are apt to claim that the Christians' reliance on divine authority prevents them from considering moral issues with proper sympathy and detachment, and inclines them to give restrictive and repressive answers to questions (ii) and (v). Such criticism can be constructive, and we have tried to accept it as such; but we think it often relies on an over-simplified view of the balance of opinion within the Christian Church. In the previous chapter we have made the point that there are strong divergences of opinion among Christians resulting precisely from their reactions to rapid changes in their

cultural environment. There are, however, at least two forces inclining Christians to a conservative approach which need to be further discussed; on the one hand, their reliance on the Bible and on the example of Jesus Christ in particular; and on the other the acceptance, by important Christian communities, of the theory of Natural Law.

The Appeal of the Bible

Intelligent Christian opinion no longer regards the Bible, or even the New Testament, as a text-book from which one can extract authoritative rulings which automatically decide contemporary problems. It would be hard to point to any body of Christians who lay more exclusive stress on the New Testament than evangelical Protestants; yet thinkers of this type are now disposed to emphasise the creativity of Christ's moral teaching as compared with the 'code-morality' of the Pharisees, and also his concentration on motives and ideals of character rather than on external conformity, and the responsibility he laid on his followers to 'judge for themselves what is right' under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Older fashions of thought no doubt survive among Christians, but we are inclined to think they are over-stressed by humanists, who not unnaturally desire to point out the weakest features of the faith they are opposing. Nevertheless, the Christian reliance on the New Testament operates as a restraining force, whether one regards it as a source of stability or as a brake on progress. Admittedly, modern exegesis of the New Testament is less dogmatic than it used to be, and the biblical critics have quite properly warned us not to be too ready to assume that we have exact records of authentic sayings of Jesus. Yet when all allowances are made it is hard to escape the conclusion that Christ laid down *some* positive and definite rulings for his followers and especially some which apply precisely to the relations between the sexes. It is well known that St Paul, in I Corinthians, regards the pronouncements of Jesus, where available, as literally applicable and as the final court of appeal; and it should be remembered that this letter is a valuable historical document which can be dated with some precision and which is of earlier date than the gospels.

Despite all this, there is an impressive body of Christian tradition which has long been prepared to stress the relative liberty of the Christian calling and the necessity of re-interpreting Christ's teaching to meet changing situations. St Gregory of Nyssa and St Augustine, at the end of the fourth century, were already arguing for the view that God makes different demands on different human generations; indeed this view had been expressed even earlier by Christians, in order to justify their abandoning restrictive or crude moral rules found in the Old Testament. There is, therefore, nothing strictly new in the contention that Christian discipleship can be identified in each generation by its temper and attitude rather than by its adherence to a fixed moral code. Nevertheless, within this general pattern of thought it is perfectly possible to argue that certain moral rules acquire a position in which it is inconceivable that they should be justifiably abandoned. We cannot imagine any circumstances in which it would be right to tolerate all forms of homicide. If this is so, there need be no inconsistency in claiming that certain rulings concerned with sexual conduct represent permanent moral insights, without being committed to a belief in the fixity of moral rules in general.

The Theory of Natural Law

There is a second factor which has impelled large sections of the Church to regard moral rules as fixed and unalterable, namely the theory of Natural Law. This theory is not confined to Christians today; a version of it, though much reduced in content, has been persuasively restated by Prof. H. L. A. Hart.[1] Nor did it originate with Christianity but was worked out by Stoic philosophers, and was stated in all its essentials by Cicero c.55 B.C.:

> True law is right reason in agreement with Nature; it is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting; it summons to duty by its commands, and averts from wrongdoing by its prohibitions. And it does not lay its commands or prohibitions upon good men in vain, though neither have any effect on the wicked. It is a sin to try to alter this law, nor is it allowable to

[1] *The Concept of Law* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1961).

attempt to repeal any part of it, and it is impossible to abolish it entirely. We cannot be freed from its obligations by Senate or People, and we need not look outside ourselves for an expounder or interpreter of it. And there will not be different laws at Rome and at Athens, or different laws now and in the future, but one eternal and unchangeable law will be valid for all nations and for all times, and there will be one master and one ruler, that is, God, over us all, for He is author of this law, its promulgator and its enforcing judge.[1]

The law which this theory envisages is something that has imperative or prescriptive force, telling us how we ought to act; it is thus clearly distinguishable from the 'laws of nature' as the scientist of today conceives them, which are indicative statements telling us how things actually do behave. If this theory be admitted, and if the basic principles of sexual morality fall within it then we are bound not only to accept these principles but to urge them as binding upon all men at all times. So far as the theory is denied or restricted we are left with alternative systems of morality, one of which, in the Christian view, rests on a divine revelation made through Christ to the Church. Christians may and should commend such a morality to non-Christians; they are entitled to argue that all men should adopt it; but they are not entitled to claim (as they could if the Natural Law theory held good) that all men have a duty to obey it.

We have to ask, therefore: What, if any, is the content of the Natural Law? The barest possible minimum that has sometimes been suggested is the principle that good should be done and evil avoided. But this is vacuous principle that can hardly be denied without absurdity. On the other hand, modern anthropology, to which we referred in the previous chapter, by revealing the extraordinary diversity of custom obtaining in different cultures, has made it extremely difficult to point to any considerable body of moral rules as commanding universal agreement.[2] It should be noted that in the traditional view a law is only valid if it is duly promulgated; so that in order to uphold the

[1] *De Republica*, III, xxii, 33, as translated in D'Entreves, *Natural Law*, pp. 20–21.

[2] This point was already made by Locke in denying 'Innate Practical Principles'; see *Human Understanding* I, iii, 9–13.

Natural Law theory in any developed form one has to show that a body of moral principles is recognized and accepted at least by good men in every society. Many people will now find this unconvincing. The most that can easily be claimed is that all moral systems recognize certain basic features of the human situation and claim to regulate certain areas of human life, of which sexuality is one; but the method of regulation varies widely in different cultures. This variation does not of course imply that all such methods are equally good; it is quite legitimate to argue that some sets of rules are better than others. But it does tend to discount the view that God made known a definite set of moral requirements to all men everywhere, and that these requirements are thus comparable to a duly promulgated law.

It may be repeated in passing that the classical Christian statement of the Natural Law theory was made, by St. Thomas Aquinas, at a time when the theory of evolution was discredited and when no-one could foresee the vast changes in the conditions of human life and the widening of human choices and responsibilities which scientific progress has since brought about. Further, St Thomas was opposing the view, soon to be adopted by Duns Scotus, which regarded the Natural Law as reformable, but did so at the cost of asserting that it rested on a mere fiat of the divine will, for which no reason could be sought or given. In contending that Divine Law was not arbitrary, St Thomas was led to maintain that it could never change; a third possibility, that of holding that God wisely adjusts his requirements to our changing needs, was not sufficiently noticed.

Morality as Law

We turn now to consider another objection to the notion of a moral law. It may be said that there is a basic fault in conceiving of morality as a 'law'; for either the term 'law' has to be interpreted so broadly that it means virtually nothing, or else (more probably) a misleading suggestion is given. Thus it is misleading to compare morality to a law of nature in the scientific sense, since we no longer suppose, as the Stoics did, that stars and other such bodies are animate beings who consent to obey

their instructions. It is no less misleading to compare morality with legislation, since it is acknowledged that the laws of civilized countries only roughly approximate to the moral notions of responsible citizens. An act may be immoral without being illegal; or again the law may require what our conscience condemns. The concept of equity rests on the recognition that the law may operate harshly or unfairly in certain cases. Furthermore, 'legalism' is a term for a recognized moral failing; the legalist, if he is scrupulous, will go to absurd lengths in fulfilling commandments to the letter; if he is lax he will take advantage of every possible loop-hole; and indeed, he may show both traits together. His fault lies precisely in the fact that he interprets his duties as if they consisted in obedience to a fixed and all-sufficient code.

If we ask, what makes a good law, it will be agreed that one condition is that it must be endorsed by the moral judgment of responsible citizens. But the wise legislator also takes account of technical merits and defects in laws, of which some probably spring from the imperfections of human societies, while some are inherent in codes as such, and result simply from the difficulty of applying general rules to fit a wide variety of cases. Laws should be clear, enforceable and few; in order to be clear they often view situations in black-and-white terms and lay down arbitrary limits. (On your 18th birthday this is legal, however imprudent; one day earlier it is illegal, however innocuous.) In order to be enforceable they must not be too idealistic, or they will lose public support; and they must deal with detectable facts—hence the law takes no cognizance of motives, unless they issue in actions. Thirdly, there is a presumption in favour of leaving people their freedom of choice if possible; hence the law does not intervene unless the public interest is seriously affected, and not always even then. Certain actions generally recognised as wrongful are not punished as crimes. For the same reason the law tends to be negative; it deters and punishes and sometimes offers inducements, but seldom rewards; it recognizes grades of offences, but has no grades of commendation

This discussion may serve to illustrate three roughly similar objections which are being used against codified morality. Its

critics complain of its negative approach, its externalism and its artificial use of labels and categories. Thus, to take an extreme example, the critic who objects to the rule which condemns adultery in all circumstances might set out his argument as follows:

(*a*) Why are you always condemning? The positive way to check adultery is to teach people how to love their own partners.

(*b*) You should judge by motives. It is the loveless marriage which is the real failure. Any relationship, even an adulterous one, which evinces real love, is to be commended.

(*c*) Adultery is a process, not an act. It is absurd to tolerate the approaches to intercourse and then impose one hundred per cent condemnation on the act which naturally follows.

Our present concern is to explain these objections, not to endorse them; but to show the state of the argument we must indicate the kind of replies which could be given. It could be said, for instance, that moral condemnation, even where necessary–and only a moral imbecile will condone everything–is always regrettable, and should certainly be balanced by commendation and positive teaching. The real question, then, is whether the present balance is right. Alternatively, it could be argued that it is not necessarily illiberal to condemn; to rule out certain activities, leaving the agent otherwise free, may prove a more liberal policy than to attempt to impose patterns of virtuous conduct in detail. The second point might be met by saying that we need a more discriminating appraisal of motives. In particular, romantic love can be an indulgence that unfits one for the serious business of life, whereas loyalty and fidelity are underrated virtues. Thirdly, it can be said that all moral codes require common-sense in their interpretation; and if an act is wrong, common-sense suggests that the approaches to it should be avoided; at the very least this is quite as logical as the suggestion that if the approaches are tolerated the act must be too. It may be arbitrary to impose formal censure at any particular point; but this does not mean that it must not be imposed at all.

This discussion of contemporary arguments brings us to the

point at which we must set out three positions which Christians might adopt towards moral rules, and indicate which of them we think acceptable.

Three Christian Positions Examined

Position I

The extreme conservative position, which has been most fully worked out in the Christian developments of the Natural Law theory, regards moral rules as possessing permanent and absolute validity, so that the morality of a particular act is ultimately determined by whether or not it falls under the relevant rule. Within this general framework it is of course possible to incorporate much valuable direction with regard to motives; but this usually involves the proviso that while a bad motive can make an otherwise good act bad, the reverse does not apply; thus motives are seen as a secondary, though no doubt important, factor in determining the morality of an act. Again not all the rules need be negative; though it is characteristic, and perhaps unavoidable, that the negative rules should be more precise, and attract more attention, than the positive ones.

We find this position untenable for a variety of reasons. Our discussion of Natural Law has already suggested that permanent and absolute validity can only be claimed for a small number of exceedingly general principles which no reasonable man would dispute. The main principles of our working morality cannot be regarded in this light; since, first, moral rules can conflict, and in any such case one of the conflicting rules must be set aside; and secondly, it proves in practice very difficult to lay down absolute moral principles in precise terms so as to be morally acceptable without committing the fallacy of circular definition. Thus the principle that (e.g.) stealing is always wrong, is only helpful if there is some reasonably objective criterion of what constitutes stealing; it becomes circular if there is a tacit convention not to call an act 'stealing' unless we already agree that it is wrong.

Besides these technical objections to the extreme conservative position, we have a more important reservation, though admittedly one which is less easy to substantiate. We judge that in

their traditional form the moral system based on the concept of Natural Law cannot be sufficiently harmonized either with the best moral sense of our own day or with the teaching of Jesus as we have come to understand it. We are now much more ready to recognize moral goodness among people who live by very different moral codes from our own. In doing so, we think we can appeal to our Lord's example. This suggests that moral goodness is not to be identified with adherence to a particular code, even if that code be the best one, to the extent that the traditional moral systems imply. Indeed, quite alien moral codes may foster distinctive forms of virtue which are worthy of respect and are not to be dismissed simply as moral errors committed in good faith; and we are entitled to say this without in the least implying that the choice of codes is a matter of indifference, or one on which no rational argument is possible. We should add that there are signs of a reappraisal of the Natural Law tradition, not least within the Roman Catholic Church, where there is a concern to bring the traditional moral theology more closely into line with the New Testament; but it is probably too early to say what developments are likely to follow. Yet it is not impossible that the extreme conservative position will be abandoned, or radically modified, by the body which has most powerfully championed it.

Position II

The position which commends itself to a majority of our group, might be described as a modified conservative position. This would give considerably more weight to motives in evaluating moral action, though without adopting the radical thesis that motive is the only significant criterion or that love is the only significant motive. It would seek to define the position of moral rules by saying that even if moral rules are not theoretically perfect, or exactly indicative of God's will at the deepest level, yet in many cases they provide the best guidance we have, so that for practical purposes it is rational to treat them as absolute. This policy involves no dishonesty or lack of realism; it simply endorses the verdict of Aristotle that morality can never be an exact science.

This verdict has been widely approved and has even impressed

itself on common speech; to say that something is 'morally' or 'practically' certain is to say that it is almost certain, and in this way, 'practically' has come to be used as a synonym for 'almost'.

Developing this line of thought, it is possible to make motive and character the primary subject of moral judgment, while also giving great weight to the value of a sound moral code as an indispensable framework within which good motives and dispositions will be encouraged. However, all actual codes contain elements of greater or lesser importance; and we would suggest that some moral rules are of such weight that no code could justifiably omit them. Consequently

(*a*) It may be held that certain rules are for all practical purposes universally valid, so that it is never morally justifiable to break them; and it may be held that the rules of abstinence before marriage and fidelity within it are of this character; or

(*b*) It may be held that even if such rules do not completely coincide with the rights and wrongs of each case taken in isolation, yet they do prescribe what is normally good for our society. In this case we may have a duty to uphold the rule even at some sacrifice of personal liberty.

Position III

The third position,[1] which finds some support among our group, may be described as a modification of the liberal view. It has been outlined by one of our members in the following terms:

Moral rules only express the collective choices of different human individuals and societies, some of them Christian, but most not, over the centuries. They have evolved, and are evolving. They are relative rather than immutable, though some are naturally less mutable than others. They are essentially educative devices though they may be valuable in, as it were, the post-graduate period by their provision of a concrete familiar body of doctrine against which human beings involved in difficult situations can test their own incomplete knowledge, mixed motives and unreliable emotions.

On this view, moral rules, regarded as 'educative devices',

[1] Adopted recently by a serious minded minority.

are to be treated with respect but in no case as the final court of appeal. The mature individual at least is free to set aside the rule, after due consideration, and decide a case in accordance with his own judgment of the best interests of the parties involved, and of society. The rightness or otherwise of the act will on this view depend partly on whether his judgment is sound, and partly on the integrity of his motives; though these two criteria are not always clearly distinguished. It may be noted that even fairly radical moralists are willing to retain moral rules in some such advisory capacity. It is after all fairly obvious that they are the only device which is simple and concrete enough to be useful to children and to many ordinary people. But writers of this school often suggest that they themselves and many of their readers have attained the necessary moral maturity to reinterpret the rules and on occasion to set them aside.

In order to see how this view of moral rules applies to our problems of sexual morality, we may perhaps compare the case of truth-telling. It might be said that the good of society requires that lies be avoided, and that we consequently teach children to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth; at a more mature age they will still fulfil their duty to society if they are usually truthful; but this allows them to set aside the rule on occasions when accuracy would be pedantic, or a disclosure unkind, or an untruth clearly advisable despite the general presumption against it. In the parallel case, it might be said that if we accepted the general principle that intimate sex acts should be reserved for the expression of loving relationships, we would teach children to abstain from sexual play and experimentation, and instruct young people that marriage is the proper sphere of sexual activity in the full sense, but we should leave the individual parties free to decide whether a personal relationship has achieved the intimacy and tenderness of which sexual intercourse is the appropriate expression, either in cases where a marriage is intended, or where it is not.

Some such position is attractive to some members of our group. To state it in a form which Christian judgment can accept, however, requires a fairly careful consideration of two of its main features, namely the use of motives as a criterion, and the assump-

tion that the liberty claimed is compatible with a responsible attitude to society at large.

In the first place, we have to examine the claim that actions are justified by the quality of personal relationships that are manifested in them. This may be argued either as a general thesis, or specifically in relation to sex; but it is not self-evident. In particular we need to examine the phrases which are commonly used in making such claims, such as the 'quality' and 'depth' of the relationship. It is not at once clear how far such phrases denote emotional states, e.g. admiration for the other's attributes, whether physical, mental or spiritual; how far mental conditions, e.g. an instinctive sympathy and common tastes and views; and how far intentions, e.g. the resolve to subordinate one's own advantage to that of one's partner. If any or all of such factors are to be used as the criterion of behaviour, it is plainly important that they should be clearly identified and clearly distinguished–by those who think the distinction crucial–from sheer intensity of passion.

But sexual love often may, and sometimes should, be passionate; and this marks an important point at which the moral dimensions of sexuality differ from those of truth-telling. The whole process of sexual exploration culminating in intercourse is, or can be, one which makes a profound impression on both parties. In cases where physical curiosity is satisfied in early youth and actual intercourse begins soon after puberty, it still seems that the process of falling in love can supervene as a distinct stage, arousing emotions which are both powerful and disturbing, because unexpected and unprecedented. The young lover does not know how to describe his experience either to himself or to others. If we then say that he may follow his urgent physical desires to the full *provided* he is certain that to do so would be an expression of true love, we are imposing a condition which we cannot seriously expect him to fulfil. If we are really in earnest about this demand for self analysis, the lover is the last person of whom it should be made. It is always difficult to judge our own motives, and most of all when we are under the stress of strong emotion. It is precisely in such situations that an objective test is required. And it may be added, in no case is it more difficult to be honest with oneself than about love, an ideal

which has been so disastrously corrupted and exploited by commercial interests.

Secondly, it seems clear that friendships and intimacies, valuable as they may be, are not automatically exempt from the criticism that intense personal attachments, whether within marriage or outside it, may at least sometimes come into conflict with the individual's duties in some wider sphere. A marriage can be uxorious; an intense romantic friendship can spell the neglect of one's work or other responsibilities. Conversely, of course, one could perform one's public duty while neglecting one's domestic ties and responsibilities; on the other hand, celibacy, if properly undertaken with generous recognition of the sacrifices involved, can set the agent free for acts of service which would be impossible without it.

We do not regard these last three paragraphs as necessarily demolishing the third position; we think our proviso might possibly be met. But we are bound to criticize the more extreme form of the claim for private judgment, namely the claim that sexual relationships are personal matters in which neither the law nor codified morality has the right to interfere. It is said, for instance, that an engaged couple have just as much right to decide whether to proceed to intercourse as a married couple to decide what form of physical endearments they shall use.

Certainly, the distinction between public and private behaviour is important; thus the law differentiates between private immorality and public indecency. We should also probably agree that *some* attempts at a legal regulation of private conduct have rightly been abandoned, or should be abandoned: thus we should not wish to see any form of lovemaking between married couples accepted as a ground for prosecution, however bizarre or distasteful it may seem. On the other hand it is equally clear that the mere fact that sexual lovemaking is normally conducted in private is not itself a reason for exempting it from legal or moral requirements. We cannot excuse e.g. homosexual seduction of the young, just because it is private. What has to be shown (and is in fact often argued) is that 'free love' between adults involves no damage to the individual or to society.

There is some justice in the claim that there is no such thing

as purely private conduct. To put the point less paradoxically, every action, however private, has some repercussions on society sooner or later. Thus it can be argued that even an engaged couple are doing a disservice to society if they 'anticipate marriage'. With all its drawbacks the rule of abstinence from full intercourse before marriage has the advantage of being clear and unambiguous. It is unrealistic to suppose that if this rule is no longer upheld the concessions will only be claimed by engaged couples; and in any case an engagement is not a final commitment. To weaken the rule may well encourage free sexual intercourse between the unmarried, and ultimately increase the incidence of promiscuity and of adultery. This may be a real, but not overriding, argument in favour of traditional morality. Certainly it convincingly shows up the fallacy of claiming that what goes on between two people in the sexual sphere is no-one's business but their own.

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THE BIOLOGICAL AND RELATIONAL ASPECTS OF HUMAN SEXUALITY

THE place of scientific knowledge in the making of moral decisions is too large a subject to be fully explored in this Report, but a few guiding principles may serve as an introduction to this section where the meaning and purpose of sex is viewed from the standpoint of biologist and psychologist.

The scientific method of observation and experiment yields factual knowledge of the world which is of the utmost value in the exercise of moral choices. Indeed it can be argued that scientific research is always at the service of moral ends since in practice research in a particular field is initiated less by a spirit of free enquiry than as a response to some need amongst individuals or society at large. We should actively encourage those lines of enquiry which are likely to yield factual information about crucial moral issues e.g. aspects of human reproduction. It is important to stress, however, that such information, though crucial, cannot of itself prescribe answers to moral problems, so presenting us with a kind of moral *fait accompli.*

Man has emerged as a creature with the power to review and influence his own evolution. We cannot, therefore, draw conclusions from the broad sweep of evolution about what man's end should be. Detailed scientific knowledge is, however, indispensable in deciding specific moral questions; in some cases scientific findings will indicate that only one policy accords with our established moral axioms: but it remains open for men to choose not only what parts they consider relevant but also what relative weight they will attach to them.

Biological

Sexuality is not limited to human beings. It is one of the basic facts of the structure of most creatures, and all animals of

any complexity are differentiated into two sexes. We are not primarily concerned with animals below man, but as sexuality is one of the endowments of evolution to man we must see what role it plays among living creatures in general. We must here adopt a biological point of view as the only one which is relevant for our present purpose, for social and psychological factors as normally understood do not concern animals below man.

Sexuality arose early in the evolution of life; its function seems to have been to ensure that two individuals contributed to the structure of each new one. This, with mutation and the possibility of combining new genetic variations, was the key to advances in structure and function. Without sexuality, evolution would presumably have been impossible.

But sexuality made reproduction more difficult in that there had to be fertilization. For hundreds of millions of years this probably occurred exclusively outside the parents, which lived in the water and reproduced much as most fish do today. Life on land presented new problems, in that sex cells turned out loose after the former fashion would inevitably have been destroyed by desiccation. Hence arose the need for specialised structure for internal fertilization, and (in mammals) for gestation. Sexual structures had by now been localised in most creatures in the lower abdomen, and internal fertilization meant two creatures coming into close physical contact at the most improbable part of their anatomies. This was only ensured by another new feature, the mating urge—the first trace of what later becomes the 'relational' aspect of sex in humans. Gradually an element of selection (of mates) seems to have crept in. A mature bird does not automatically mate with the first one of the opposite sex encountered. In some creatures considerable display and adornment is developed. But the end is still reproduction, one more generation added to the millions.

The colossal strength of this hormone-controlled mutual attraction has to be kept in mind throughout this discussion. Each of us has in his ancestral history at least one hundred million successive matings achieved by this mechanism. If in one single instance the reproductive urge had not been able to

bring two individuals blindly into the difficult process of mating, we should not be here today.

It is in the nature of mating behaviour that it may begin by being tentative and uncertain of its objective, and become more purposeful as it advances. This is particularly obvious in human beings. A handclasp, a kiss or a caress, these are among the recognised and accepted modes of this tentative behaviour, and the extent to which they are mutually acceptable will be one of the factors determining their progress.

The element of parental care is introduced when more complex creatures begin to have a definite childhood period of development. This means that reproduction is no longer a process which ends at birth or laying. The higher animals, especially human beings, are provided with instincts which normally ensure that their offspring will be protected and cared for. A process, then, which begins with an interested glance or an affectionate holding of hands, may not be complete until two parents have completed their contribution to the education of their child. But does it follow that, when the same tentative behaviour is mutually acceptable and accepted, it is 'normal' that it should in due course progress until a process of mating has been completed?

It is at the point of parental care that biology leads off towards sociology. Among animals we can see that it is quite usual that the burden of this care does not fall equally on the two parents. In some species (e.g. of birds) it is possible and not unusual for the father to assume the care of the offspring; but in mammals the mother alone is capable of lactation, and normally shows the greater aptitude for the simple loving attention which the very young require. This illustrates an important principle; sexuality necessarily allocates different functions to the two sexes, and some difference between them is basic and inherent.

In human beings the difference is obvious where parenthood is intended. It is the mother who has, quite literally, to 'carry the baby' during the first nine months of its life; and if, for instance, two students arrange to have a baby, it will be the mother who will have to suffer the greater burden of inconvenience if the baby decides to be born at the time of an important examina-

tion. The new-born child is also, as we have said, more dependent on the mother than on the father, and the question whether a woman shall continue her career after having a baby often depends on a decision about whether she can devote sufficient time to both tasks, attention to her profession and care of her baby.

But how far are the differences between the sexes real in the sense that they are biologically fixed, and how far are they merely a product of social habit and development? And where psychological attitudes are 'typical' of one sex, how far are these immutable? We do not think enough is known about these aspects, but at least it should be obvious that much traditional sex-limited behaviour can be changed.

The extent to which new discoveries may have revolutionised the traditional pattern of relationships between men and women cannot yet be accurately assessed. It is certainly a plausible and widely held view that effective birth control has made it possible for sexual intercourse to be used simply for its relational purpose, and that, when this is done, the two partners meet on a basis of equality. But there is at least some evidence to suggest that such a view is superficial, and that it fails to take sufficiently into account the strength of the biological processes which provide the dynamic for sexual behaviour. These processes, for the woman especially, condition her not simply to the act of intercourse, but to the adaptation of a large part of her life to preparation for the birth and nurture of a child, and this whether a child is expected or planned at any single act of intercourse or not. For many women the act of intercourse has its chief significance in her readiness to become the mother of her partner's child, and in her welcoming of him to share the responsibilities of the task so created.

Further, even when children are intended, the traditional pattern need not apply in its entirety. Though women still have to 'carry the baby', improvements in artificial feeding and relaxations in social convention make it possible for the father who is domestically inclined to care for the child after it is born, leaving the mother free to resume her career. The emancipation of women is a fine achievement, and one which greatly

enriches our society, for the man is also at last emancipated from the artificially defined man's world in which he used to be set.

Clearly there are many distinctions between the sexes which are of social origin, and temporary. Some men cook, some women are breadwinners in the family. Traditionally feminine traits of character may sometimes consort with masculine physical structure and vice versa. The less rigid distinction between the sexes may well be an advantage to society and beneficial to the individuals concerned. But human life might be impoverished and not enriched if the equality of the sexes were held to demand that no specialisation of function should be tolerated. And decisions could be unnecessarily complicated if we could no longer take male or female sex as at least a *prima facie* guide to the role to be adopted in the family.

It would be a mistake, also, to regard equality as meaning identity. Male and female are different, and it is two different parts which are joined together in a sexual relationship to make a single whole. Whether or not the difference is of a permanent psychological kind, it would be unrealistic to assume that a pattern of human responses and satisfactions vital to the whole previous history of the human race and its ancestors can be changed over-night.

Men and women still differ in their approach to sexual intercourse. It is perhaps possible to relate this contrast to a basic difference in the physiology of the two sexes. The female is physically capable of mating without being sexually aroused; the male is not. Hence we should expect the man's sexual responses and satisfactions to be sharply focussed in physical passion since this is a *sine qua non* for the survival of the species; in the woman, the biological utility of the sexual satisfaction is that of maintaining the sexual association as a context for the family; thus her responses are less quickly aroused, but even more tenacious and forward-looking. This pattern inevitably persists even when, in a satisfactory and stable partnership, the two lovers to some extent learn to understand one another's reactions.

Relational

The writings of Sigmund Freud have familiarised us with the

concept of sex as a creative force which is present in everyone from birth. Not all psychologists accept this concept without reserve; some would think it misleading to enlarge the definition of sex so widely as to include the primitive self-assertion and self-love of the new-born infant, and would recognise a Life Instinct as the fundamental spring of action. But such differences are partly over questions of definition; and in any case there is a large measure of agreement between psychologists of different schools where the facts of human development are concerned. Each baby is born with a capacity for love and for hate and with the need for emotional security. These are first felt in the earliest of all relationships between the baby and its mother. Not only physical gratification in the form of food and warmth, but affection and tenderness are required to give emotional security. A child who is loved learns to love in return, and is able to form loving relationships through which he develops a capacity for sympathy, loyalty, tenderness and respect for others.

The child understands the depth and meaning of love through the actions of mother and other people rather than by words. Sex is the mainspring behind maternal instinct and maternal love. Thus when a mother is happy and well adjusted as a wife and mother her love for her child is selfless and geared to the needs of the child. Where her relationships, particularly with her husband, are unhappy, consciously or unconsciously she finds her own emotional satisfaction through her children either by rejecting them or by loving them possessively or destructively. The first emotion a child experiences is love of its mother. If this is refused by her, the child becomes anxious and this anxiety gives way to anger and resentment. The anger and resentment are the response to the fear of not receiving love. Those who are rejected may also respond in a negative way by withdrawal, or failure to conform. The taboo on tenderness, which is part of our pattern, may be responsible for the child building up unconscious aggressions because he is prevented from developing his most generous responses. Such negative responses set up a barrier of resistance to every kind of relationship with fellow human beings. Out of hostility and aggression grow cruelty, mistrust, jealousy, envy and contempt. Whether love or aggression

will predominate in a child's relationship with others, depends on the conditioning in childhood. We cannot be certain to what extent each baby at birth has a genetically determined emotional disposition which governs his response to environmental situations and stresses, but the environmental is generally accepted to have even more bearing on the way those earliest feelings develop. Of course all children experience aggressive impulses and feelings such as jealousy, anger, hate, frustrations (for example the first child normally experiences jealousy in some degree when the second child is born) which they should learn to tolerate without too much guilt or anxiety, at the same time keeping them under control. The over-protected child does not learn to tolerate and adapt to its surroundings, to give and take with others; the rejected child either suppresses such feelings in a desire to please with consequent anxiety, or behaves aggressively to attract attention. This pattern colours relationships with all others in and out of the home.

There is a latent period in sexual development from about the age of seven until pre-pubertal changes begin; then, parallel with the obvious physical and mental growth at puberty, children experience a growth in emotional sexual development which leads to more intense feelings for parents and people, a quest for emotional relationships and a heightened awareness of their own sex and sexual urges. These do not develop at the same pace, and physical maturity tends to be reached before emotional maturity. Given the opportunity, the normal adolescent grows through each phase of sexual development and on to the next without undue trouble. Thus in a happy home, a very common pattern of development is that the adolescent's intensified feelings are at first homosexual, involving the mother and friends of the same sex as themselves. Later, for the girl, the ties with the mother are loosened, with accompanying aggression, and feelings transferred to her father. The girl leaves the homosexual stage behind when she thus 'falls in love' with her father and so learns to make relationships with members of the opposite sex. The boy, while remaining fond of his mother, learns to identify himself with his father and his masculine role in life. The first 'sexual' love for both is the parent of the opposite sex. This

gives rise to sexual fantasies and jealousy of the other parent which, however, usually arouse guilt because of the various taboos imposed by society and are firmly repressed: fantasy becomes the substitute until other outlets are found, and becomes all important when reality is too difficult. The dividing line is often unclear. By the time relationships with parents are resolved the young have identified with their own sex and role in life, and are ready for, and indeed hungry for, mature relationships with other people. Unresolved parental conflicts interfere with the ability to relate in a mature way with other people and particularly in marriage, the closest of all relationships.

Some degree of rebellion appears to be necessary for the adolescent to establish his own identity and independence. In freeing himself from social and parental control he commonly experiments with his newly developed sex feelings, by masturbation or homosexual or heterosexual exchanges, whether overt or not. Rebellion against the sexual *mores* of parents is often satisfying to the rebel and some excesses are inevitable.

Prior to adolescence, attitudes to sex are largely conditioned by parents—absorbed from their example as much as by rational explanation or reprimand. All normal societies attempt to influence or control sexual development of the young and to provide rules for acceptable sexual conduct—laid down with varying degrees of anxiety by teachers and parents. The need of the adolescent is to learn to understand and so control and direct his own sexual urges, and his capacity to do so is the measure of his advance towards adulthood.

Part of the adolescent rebellion is against hypocrisy. He finds it difficult to reconcile the conflicting *mores* of the different groups to which he belongs, each one of which may have confidence in its own interpretation of the rightness of a moral decision and its own intuitive value judgment. Obedience to his parents' *mores* will not satisfy him as a complete definition of morality, and not all adolescents are content to challenge these in theory only.

Not all difficulties, however, arise out of rebellion: too much stress on guilt, or too many obstacles in the way, can inhibit sexual development at any stage. Parents and society often fail

to realise that the need is for individual help, not moral judgment.

Much remains to be learnt and understood about the processes of development which we have been describing. It seems perhaps that sex and love develop separately and irregularly and it is not until these fuse that the young are ready for marriage. The capacity for love intensifies sexual feelings and the sexual urge becomes a hunger for something beyond sex, a desire for continuous and intimate companionship with a loved person, a searching for someone who best fulfils the emotional needs both conscious and unconscious at that time. The young girl who has known security and a happy home life and has loved her father will tend to repeat her parents' pattern and seek someone like her father. The young man whose relationship with his parents has been a close and affectionate one may unconsciously seek someone like his mother. Their ideas of the role that each should play in married life will usually correspond with what each has known and grown up with.

But what of the young who have known unhappiness and rejection and frustration at home? All these feelings are intensified at this stage so that conflicts increase. Sometimes an emotional conflict with parents becomes too satisfying to leave behind, and is continued outside the home with friends who are chosen because of their likeness to the parents. More often the young person leaves home in a state of rebellion and is then attracted to someone different from his parents. A young woman who is immature and unwilling to grow up and accept responsibility, and who does not come to terms with her jealousy of her mother, may look for an older man to be a 'father' to herself, one who will continue to treat her as a child. A young man whose emotional ties to his mother have never been severed may seek someone to mother him rather than a partner to share his life, and may indeed not be able to marry until his mother dies. An irresponsible man who is afraid of responsibility may be attracted to an efficient and competent woman, while the man who is anxious about his masculinity may seek a 'clinging vine'. Such relationships may foster further emotional growth, and allow progress to more mature relationships with other people; but if marriage occurs

to satisfy those immature needs, it is obvious that they may soon be outgrown and cause much tension.

Sexual intercourse is motivated by the desire for relationship. It is not possible wholly to separate the relational and the procreational aspects in human beings. We have seen that marriages are made to satisfy certain basic needs in each partner. Not only basic physical needs such as food and sleep have to be met, but all kinds of basic psychological needs which include security and recognition. When these are met the companionship and togetherness of marriage can overcome any differences in standards of value and interests and make it possible for each one to give of his best to the other. The relational aspects of sex in marriage, including therefore as it does everything from the comfort of shared interests and responsibilities and commonplace events to the climax of sexual passion, seems to be more important to most couples in our society at the beginning of marriage than the generative aspect. Later, however, when love within marriage has provided emotional security and satisfied primitive relationship needs, the instinctive urge to reproduce grows stronger.

Because sex produces intense feelings and because love has an aggressive component, so that denial of love produces aggression, there must be an outlet for sexual feelings in every marriage relationship. Where they are not expressed in a positive way, in love and consideration, they are likely to be expressed in a negative way, in resentments and even hatreds. Similarly in coital relationships where there is no joy and loving satisfaction negative manifestations such as discomfort, dislike, repugnance and withdrawal into impotence or frigidity will eventually develop.

Yet the coital relationship is not a separate entity but is the final expression of the whole marriage relationship. It involves the very deepest, most emotional and least rational of all our feelings, so that like a barometer it reflects in a very sensitive way changes of feeling almost before the individual consciously is aware of them.

The relational value of coitus between husband and wife cannot better be described than in the following quotation: 'Those relational acts of coitus between husband and wife

which cement and deepen their love, relieve their physical and psychological sexual tensions and contribute to their personal fulfilment and integration have an effect which naturally overflows the bounds of the one flesh, so that such coitus is directly beneficial to the whole family. It cannot too strongly be stressed that the well-being of the family depends to a greater extent than perhaps has been realised hitherto, on the well-being of one flesh—and to that well-being regular coitus makes a profound contribution.'[1]

[1] *The Family in Contemporary Society* (SPCK 1958), p. 226.

5

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Those who love the truth must seek love in marriage, that is, love without illusions. *Albert Camus*

IT has become apparent that we cannot discuss the relational aspect of sex without using the word love. We have to recognise that this introduces a new dimension, and will involve a different type of thinking from scientific investigations into sex, or philosophical reasoning about morality. It becomes important, before proceeding further, to know just what content we give to this highly ambiguous word.

The Greeks not only had a word for it; they had four, a distinct aid to clear thinking. In English the theologian, the psychologist, and the film-script writer have all to use the same word, which not surprisingly makes for confusion. When Dr John Robinson in *Honest to God* argues that love is the one built-in criterion of moral judgment, he is but echoing St Paul's 'Love is the fulfilling of the law', or St Augustine's 'Love and do what you will'. But the word St Paul uses in his famous hymn to love in I Cor. 13 is not that celebrated by classical poets in their 'art of love'; and it is doubtful whether the pop-singer and Dr Robinson are speaking the same language when they use the word love.

Marriage is almost as difficult a word. Mating arrangements in different human societies are so various that social anthropologists are now rather reluctant to define precisely what constitutes marriage. In our own society, however, marriage conveys that a man and woman are living together, generally with the intention of founding a family; that their relationship is assumed to be life-long and to be distinguished from other less regulated types of sexual union; and that it had been preceded

by a public ceremony, if not expressly before God, at least in the sight of a secular congregation.

In Christian societies, though not only in them, it is assumed that marriage also has to do with love, of a kind which includes but goes beyond sexual attraction and desire. That is why we consider both love and marriage within the confines of a single chapter. Visibly, there exist loveless marriages, and also love affairs which transcend the sexual appetites of the partners yet are conducted without thought of marriage. Nevertheless, in most people's understanding love and marriage go together: our ideal of marriage includes all the elements which we understand by the word love.

The meanings of love

This is itself a comparatively recent development in human affairs. Not only our understanding of love, but love itself, changes colour over the centuries. Paul sang no hymn to *eros*, that passionate desire to possess which the Greeks elevated to godly status. The New Testament as a whole is reticent about this aspect of relations between men and women. We turn to the Song of Solomon if we want to find sexual desire celebrated rather than merely acknowledged. On the other hand Sophocles (a sensitive and 'religious' Greek poet) sang no hymn to *agape*, the unforced loving-kindness towards other people which was embodied in Jesus and thereafter became the quality most sought out and regarded by those who came under his influence.

From the time of Jesus it became possible to look forward to a fusion between these two kinds of love, and to the end of the fatal dualism of flesh and spirit which is often blamed on Christianity but in fact long preceded it. But new images of love are not formed overnight. As long as women were looked upon as socially, physically, intellectually and spiritually inferior to men, the love whose essence is to confer worth and dignity on the other could only gradually penetrate the encounter of the sexes. Now, however, at the very time when women have won a new, unprecedented freedom, the very concept of 'disinterested' love is being called in question. As one modern interpretation of Freud puts it:

All loves are unmasked as self-satisfactions: from the love of the child for the parent provider, to the love of spouses which re-incarnates these parent-images, to the parent's 'narcissistic' love for his own children. That love must serve the self or the self will shrink from it, that the self may chase love round an object back to itself again—this is Freud's brilliant and true insight.

Contemporary literature and behaviour alike suggest that under the impact of more accurate knowledge about the forces which drive us into each other's arms we are becoming realists rather than romanticists about love. The erotic is more and more unremittingly celebrated, whether with the delicacy of a French film or the suggestiveness of an English advertisement, but in our own experience young people are less prone than has sometimes been feared to confuse these games with love, let alone marriage. The danger, for old as well as young, is different; it is that in acting out of the games on the level at which they are offered we easily forget that they are played with persons. Thus, it is possible for the founder of *Playboy* and the bunny clubs to preach the dogma that sex is 'fun', but be disconcerted on being asked at what age his own daughter will be allowed to apply the doctrine. The Christian criticism of *Playboy* and its imitators is not that they are 'erotic' but that they leave out love in any sense of the word. As Harvey Cox has put it: 'They are basically antisexual. . . For *Playboy's* man others—especially women—are *for* him. They are his leisure accessories, his playthings. For the Bible, man only becomes man by being *for* the other.'[1]

If, then, modern men risk making *eros* into a god, it is no longer in the Greek sense, as the repository of an ultimate mystery with which there is no argument: 'love unconquered in battle', as Sophocles wrote. Instead, they deify *eros* in the sense of contenting themselves with what they know to be only a part, if the most accessible part, of the truth about human love.

The pursuit of love in all its infinitely varied meanings and

[1] Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (SCM Press 1965), p. 204.

disguises is now a common pursuit to which Christians think they have something to contribute, rather than a subject in which the Church conceives itself expert. Especially is this true of love in the context of marriage. As we saw in the previous chapter, the human sciences have made us aware that our capacity to form strong and enduring sexual attachments depends heavily —though fortunately, not exclusively—on the ways in which our parents loved or failed to love us. Children in their early years are so vulnerable that they need loving marriages and secure homes for their development, and a person who is responsible for a child's lack of this environment sins against it as seriously as a stranger who assaults it in a park.

The Christian understanding of Marriage

Facts such as these address a particular appeal to the institution of marriage. Marriage is not automatically either loving or secure, and there are a few who argue that it is not even necessary, at least in the form which it has taken in our own culture. But by the law of England and Scotland, marriage is 'the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others'. In the West it has long been officially recognised that it is in the interests of the community, the marriage partners, and their children, that marriage should be monogamous and permanent. Strikingly, this has remained true even in cultures where various unofficial arrangements exist for satisfying erotic discontents after marriage. Tycoons may maintain mistresses, film stars may work through (by courtesy of Reno) as many husbands as the woman of Samaria. But whether in Paris, Hollywood or London, marriage itself is the norm from which departures are tolerated, and it is an imprudent couple which chooses a socially unrecognised way to flout its conventions.

All this suggests that marriage does in fact fulfil several disparate functions which have to be held in balance. By the partners themselves it is now regarded as the soil in which the complex plant of love can put down roots and flower. This high expectation of marriage has emerged, along with monogamy itself, primarily, though not exclusively, from the developing Jewish-Christian tradition. It is not as new, or as secular in character,

as some would have us think. Jeremy Taylor, the 17th century Anglican divine, expressed it like this:

When a man dwells in love, then the breasts of his wife are as pleasant as the droppings upon the hill of Hermon, her eyes are fair as the light of heaven, she is a fountain sealed, and he can quench his thirst, and ease his cares, and lay his sorrows down upon her lap, and can retire home as to his sanctuary and refectory, and his gardens of sweetness and chaste refreshment. . . All the commandments of God enjoining a man to love his wife, are nothing but so many necessities and capacities of joy.[1]

In Old Testament writing the sexual relation of a man and a woman in coitus was etymologically connected with human knowledge: Adam 'knew' Eve. In the New Testament, the significance of the 'one flesh' that two people become in marriage was reiterated and developed by both Jesus and St Paul. Dr Sherwin Bailey observes:

Although the union in 'one flesh' is a physical union established by sexual intercourse. . . it involves at the same time the whole being, and affects the personality at the deepest level. It is a union of the entire man and the entire woman. In it they become a new and distinct unity, wholly different from and set over against other human relational unities, such as the family or the race; to bring into existence the 'one flesh' a man must leave his father and mother.[2]

This concept of the body as the agent by which love is constantly renewed and deeper insight conveyed is one of Christianity's great contributions to human relationships, submerged though it has been at different periods in the Church's history.

But whatever the relational ideals entertained, the framework of social custom and regulation within which contemporary marriages occur may be unsatisfactory, and we believe that the strain which is felt at this point is one of the factors which make some look upon marriage itself as boring and inflexible. Marriage customs change more slowly than any others, except possibly funeral customs. They are slow to take into account even the

[1] Sermons xviii (The Marriage Ring part 2. Works (London 1847–1854), iv, p. 224.

[2] *The Mystery of Love and Marriage* (Longmans 1952), p. 44.

most radical social, economic, or demographic changes, let alone the more subtle shifts of attitude which Raymond Williams calls 'the climate of feeling'.

For example, we have already remarked upon the changes in the whole character of premarital life comprised in the earlier onset of puberty, the later completion of education, and the economic self-sufficiency of many young people. Marriages themselves, when contracted, may be coloured in their early stages by all these influences; but they are also obliged to weather the implications of a longer expectation of life as shown by the following table which refers to European women aged twenty:

	1690	1890	1960
Years of life expected at age 20	33.9	46	55

Since at the turn of the last century half all working class wives had between seven and fifteen children by the time they reached the age of 40, the same table also suggests that in the course of a single lifetime, the proportion of her adult life which an average woman spends on child-bearing has shrunk from a third to a fifteenth.

Undoubtedly, the withering away of the harsh physical and economic necessities by which marriage was dominated has enabled our own generation to decide more firmly that marriage is primarily about human relationships, and that it is at the service of love. Logically, it might seem to follow that marriage in some sense begins not at consummation, nor at the ceremony, but at the point where a couple's love for each other becomes fully serious; and conversely that marriage ends, and can decently be terminated, at the point where love—not only erotic emotion but all feelings of companionship and belonging—has died. It is evident that large sections of the community do in fact accept and would prefer to act upon this reasoning. A Christian version of this conclusion is put by Sherwin Bailey:

> Properly conceived as a relation of mutual self-committal based on free and responsible decision, sustained by fidelity, directed to the great enterprise of creating a common life, and marked by all the distinctive features analysed in the preceding pages, there

can be no doubt that love embodies and expresses the heart of marriage as we have now come to understand it. . .

The offer of marriage itself is a proposal to establish the common life which love demands as the condition of its fulfilment and creativity, and acceptance should theoretically lead straight to the consummation by which that common life is initiated. That this does not happen so simply in practice is because not even in this most intimate and personal of all transactions are man and woman independent of the community to which they belong; indeed, the community nowhere concerns itself more with the private business of its members.[1]

On divorce, Dr Bailey is led to the conclusion:

. . . that marriage cannot, in any intelligible sense, be termed indissoluble; but that the vow and covenant between husband and wife made at their wedding and sealed at its consummation establishes an ethical obligation of the most imperative kind to preserve the integrity and permanence of their union, and to spare no effort to deepen and enrich in every possible way the common life to which they are committed. In other words, marriage is essentially a moral, and not simply a legal, union; but it is also a personal relation and, as such, subject to relational laws and principles in general. If a couple so far fail to honour their mutual obligation as to cause, or to acquiesce in, the disintegration of that relation, no purpose is served and no principle is maintained by refusal to concede that the marriage, as a marriage, no longer exists—even though the two may continue in some sense to be bound together by their common involvement in sin and irresponsibility. In such a case, the better wisdom is surely to accept the facts, and to devise legal means by which society can take cognizance of the breakdown and release the parties from engagements which are now meaningless and incapable of fulfilment. But the matter cannot rest here. The relational context to which the vows apply and in which alone they are meaningful may have vanished, and the legal tie may have been severed, but a bond of guilt must remain. All, the community as well as the couple, share the responsibility for the breakdown and its consequences, and should make what reparation lies in their power. For Church and State, this will consist in dealing with the whole problem constructively and compassionately, with the object of bringing out of the evil

[1] *Common Sense about Sexual Ethics* (Gollancz 1962), pp. 116–7.

situation whatever good is possible. For the man and woman concerned, a successful second marriage may sometimes be the most creative personal and social amends for the original wrong done.[1]

We have deliberately chosen not to pursue farther than this the extremely complex problem of divorce, because a very strong group set up by the Archbishop of Canterbury was considering this matter while we were sitting, and has now reported.[2] We agree with the Archbishop's group that the present structure of the law in this field does not now reflect either the best Christian or the best secular understanding of marriage, but in this document we are concerned with examining the climate in which marriages succeed rather than in legislating for those that fail.

However it is relevant here to discuss the distinction sometimes drawn between 'Christian' marriage and other kinds of marriage. In the sense in which the distinction is usually employed we reject it. Marriages in churches are not legally different from civil marriages. Brides and bridegrooms in church, explicitly making their covenant with each other before God, and encouraged by the liturgy to compare it with the covenant between God and man, will regard this extra obligation with whatever degree of seriousness attends their other Christian professions. But in human terms, the commitment embarked upon in registry offices is not less serious.

If the divorce laws of England were liberalized, a wider gap than hitherto would open between the community's own marriage rules and the disciplines evolved by the different Christian communions for their own professed members. But if this made 'Christian marriage' part of a package deal to be accepted along with the rest of the faith but marked 'optional' for unbelievers, we should be sorry. For the argument of this section has been that the true difference between Christian and secular concepts of marriage, in so far as it can be defined, rests on certain insights into the nature of love. After 2,000 years, many of these insights are embedded in the mixture of our society, and the Church can hope to nourish but not to monopolize them.

[1] *Op. cit.*, pp. 174–5.
[2] *Putting Asunder* (SPCK, 1966).

Marriage has never been more popular. It has also never been more difficult, or more open to fresh development. Contemporary couples change neighbourhoods, jobs, interests and friends far more often than their ancestors did. Each partner may have pursuits which cannot easily be shared, and there is ample room for a modern marriage to fly apart, unperceived by the participants, before its natural time-span is half completed. In the circumstances, we cannot express surprise at the extent of marriage breakdown and sexual itineracy, though much more could be done, we believe, both to prepare people for the strains that they will have to face and to sustain them when the strains are felt. As one eminent judge has remarked, the public money spent on legal aid in divorce cases far exceeds the public grant to the National Marriage Guidance Council.

The strains, however, would be immeasurably increased if the presumption of permanence disappeared from our concept of marriage. The anthropologist Margaret Mead, discussing in *The American Woman* social groups where the option of divorce is felt to be readily accessible, points out that this can make people less, not more, free in their sexual self-expression. Where everyone is a potential prey or predator, an enjoyable flirtation becomes loaded with risk to marriages which the partners themselves would like to preserve. An important ingredient in married love is the love of 'belonging'—family affection, which simply takes for granted that ties of flesh and blood are unbreakable, and accepts responsibility for them, regardless of drawbacks. This tie of kinship is what a man and a woman enter upon when they accept each other 'for better, for worse'.

This assumed, not only tolerance and forbearance are engendered, but true longsuffering, forgiveness, and the bearing of one another's burdens. Without it stability is constantly threatened; any chance attraction or friendship, every quarrel or disagreement, even any temporary boredom or waning of desire, can become a menace and an intolerable anxiety, a fear that 'love' has ceased. Suspicion is apt to spoil the relationship of those who cannot take for granted this kind of love as something about which there can be no question, their complete commital to one another 'to the exclusion of all other, so long as they both shall live'.

There are times when even the best marriage has to fall back on loyalty. 'This kind of love,' says Theodor Bovet, 'maintains loyalty between couples even when one party no longer desires to be loyal and the other is unable to be'. In the context of such commitment, infidelity is seen not as an automatic ground for divorce but as an occasion for forgiveness. We do not suggest that this is easy. Adultery is a betrayal of trust, particularly when it is deliberate and continuous, not just an isolated lapse in a moment of weakness. If the partner comes to know of it there is bound to be great hurt and shaken confidence; if it is successfully concealed, then there is a lie at the heart of the relationship. The only true remedy—frank confession and full forgiveness—is possible where the marriage bond is known to be strong enough to take such a strain; where there is this belonging love. In a society which assumes divorce to be a normal consequence, and regards the forgiving partner as a fool and a would-be faithful one as either unrealistic or possessive, the situation becomes hopelessly bedevilled, and the 'belonging' essence of marriage is denied.

All these human 'kinds of loving' are images of the love of God, but all human love in itself is fallible; it is only the love of God that 'never faileth'. Romantic, passionate love can degenerate into aggressive, possessive desire. It needs to be redeemed by that self-giving quality which transforms the desire to grasp into the desire to serve the beloved; and by the constancy of the love of God, transforming the trivial and the transitory emotion into the steady desire for ever deeper and truer union with the beloved.

Comradeship too—compatibility and unity of outlook—can harden into a *grand égoisme à deux*, in which each sees in the other simply an extension of self. But a Christian couple will find in their love something more than the fulfilling of themselves in one another. It is symbolic that in the Christian marriage service the couple do not face, and drink to, one another as in some pagan ceremonies, but together face the altar of God. Their common interest, their shared life, is to be the 'walk together towards God.' This discovery of the meaning of life through the vocation of marriage—which is matched, we believe, in the

experience of many people who would not express it in specifically Christian language—can unite in true affection even those who appear to the world most incompatible.

6

THE NECESSITY OF DIALOGUE

EARLIER in this document, and especially in the preceding chapter, we have expressed some of our own attitudes, as a reasonably representative group of Christians, to the sexual relationships of men and women. These attitudes include the belief that Christian ideas about human sexuality can help to resolve the perplexities of all men whether or not they are able to accept the fullness of the gospel. However, taking this view, we are clearly obliged to submit our beliefs to the test of criticism, and of the individual, infinitely varied human situations which remind us that our sexuality can be a destructive, even tragic, force as well as the source of great happiness.

We are convinced that many of these questions, situations, and criticisms admit of no precise 'answer', and we have not been concerned in this document to build up a doctrinal structure which we could then defend against all comers. Jesus himself, we recall, constantly met inquirers—sometimes to their own irritation—not with answers but with further questions or perhaps with a parable of uncertain application. Even in centuries and societies more stable than our own, it was difficult for people to know what they should do, and to diagnose their own problems, let alone solve other people's. The Church, whatever the seeming moral certainties which it has upheld in the past, is today, we hope, in a mood to assist the search for values on which conduct can be based, rather than to convict individuals of error or sin for which their exact degree of individual responsibility is known to no human assessor. In this, the Church need not lack employment. For no individual is so private and autonomous that he does not need reminding of the duty he owes to his own humanity and to the society of which he is a member; and no social authority is so good that it does not have to be confronted with the needs of individuals.

We now turn to some of the questions which have recurred in our own discussions, our individual experience or our reading.

Nowhere in your document do you say that sexual intercourse outside marriage is invariably wrong—by definition, as it were. But having retreated from the old rule, you make a new one. Quite apart from the lingering risk of unwanted children, you suggest that intercourse is so significant that it cannot be separated from love and long-term commitment without the partners themselves, and society itself, suffering some harm. So it comes to the same thing, doesn't it?

Not quite. We are recognizing that many people in our own community today, whether they are Christians or not, do not accept religious or ecclesiastical authority as their guide in the details of their sexual behaviour. We also admit that in the past, sexual abstinence before marriage was frequently motivated by fear of consequences, social custom or economic self-interest rather than by religious obedience.

But of course, social custom can be a beneficial as well as a powerful force. We notice that even a sex pundit as radical as Dr Alex Comfort dares to enunciate two 'unbreakable rules'; 'Thou shalt not exploit another person's feelings and wantonly expose them to an experience of rejection'[1] and 'Thou shalt not under any circumstances negligently risk producing an unwanted child'. In so far as rules are relevant we are prepared to endorse these two, which would, we believe, at present rule out most of the extramarital intercourse which actually occurs.

But surely there are people—even if not from your own guilt ridden Christian backgrounds—who really can enjoy sex without being finally committed and yet without hurting each other?

People can, of course, have sexual experience which is trivially pleasurable or mildly therapeutic; no heaven or hell about it. But it is in the nature of the experience that you don't know which it is going to be, for yourself or the other person; you

[1] More succinctly expressed in Leviticus as 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'.

certainly cannot count on its being the same for both and ending conveniently at the same moment. So what is an agreeable recreation for the one may be a consuming fire for the other. Casual sex is perilous unless you are prepared to be indifferent to the other person's feelings, and hard boiled enough to avoid being hurt yourself. Once acquired, these are not qualities which can be instantly discarded when you embark on marriage.

Further, we think that this risk of harm—especially to the woman—arises partly because the corresponding possibility of joy and growth and psychic health is so great. If intercourse came to be regarded as a matter of course by couples who felt temporarily affectionate, human beings' capacity to make themselves lastingly dependent on each other, and to enjoy to the full the physical symbols of this dependence, would, we believe, have been atrophied. May it not be true in this field, as in others, that unrestrained application of technical skills—in this case contraception—could impoverish human nature just as surely as our former failure to discover and apply these skills?

Instead of laying down any clear-cut principle, you seem to expect people to make their own decisions about what kind of behaviour their degree of commitment to each other, and their other circumstances, justify. You realize, don't you, what scope for emotional blackmail this provides?

True, but this is nothing new. 'Don't you love me enough to sleep with me?' is an old gambit. The question demands another: 'Indeed, I love you enough to marry you! But marriage isn't just sleeping together, it's eating, living, growing, having children, being together for good. Until we can have the whole, I can't cheat by playing at a part; I'm just not made that way. Even if you can't understand this, don't you love me enough to wait?' If the answer is, 'Well, I know someone who will, if you won't', that reveals that the bluff has been called. What he is talking of is not 'love', which is for a specific person, but just a biological urge which anyone available can satisfy. Unless he can develop a more mature attitude to love and marriage than that, she would be happier, in the long run, to call the whole thing off, whatever the present heart-burning. (We have said 'he' and

'she' but the 'blackmail' is not always, of course, this way round. Shotgun weddings may also be a form of emotional blackmail.)

This is all very well if you are thinking of people who are able to contemplate marriage at an early date. But how does it apply to young people at an earlier stage of sexual experimentation, with perhaps five years of full time education ahead of them?

As we have already pointed out, our society has so far failed to solve the new tensions imposed on adolescents by earlier maturation and prolonged education. It may well be that our universities, like their Swedish and American counterparts, will have to accept in years to come that a high proportion of their undergraduates will marry before, or during their courses. But even if this happened, there would remain the awkward fact of life that human beings are physically ready for intercourse before they are ready emotionally, and that girls regard the experience somewhat differently from boys. These considerations are enough for us to feel able to say to children in teaching them what they need to know about contraception that they should no more expect in their early teens to embark on intercourse than they should expect to vote, drive sports cars, take out mortgages and shoulder responsibility for infants.

That sounds firm enough. But what if the young people concerned decline to listen to you? You condemn intercourse that leads, or could lead, to an abortion or the birth of an unwanted child. The logic of this is that people who are thinking of sleeping together, especially young students, ought to have the easiest possible access to contraceptives and contraceptive advice. This would serve society's interests by reducing the incidence of illegitimacy and abortion, and the Church's interest by enabling people to take decisions based on moral conviction instead of on fear.

We accept part of this argument. Such resistance as there is to putting contraceptive advice on the National Health Service does not come from the British Council of Churches. But we would like to make a few distinctions here. Consider these two possible steps. One might be the establishment of a domiciliary family planning service under local authorities to provide for

working class women with large families the same kind of facilities that have long been taken for granted by the middle classes. Another possible step might be the installation of a slot machine for contraceptives in the foyer of every university union. The first step would be a deliberate public attempt to improve the quality of people's lives and the chances of their children. The second would meet a genuine problem—the incidence of abortion among girls receiving higher education—with a remedy which by taking the cheap and easy way out could easily aggravate the disease. It would imply, wouldn't it, that the community expected intercourse to be casual, an impromptu conclusion to an evening's entertainment? In that climate, once created, abortions do not decrease but increase. For even the ready availability of contraceptives is no guarantee that in the stress of the moment they will be used.

We do not mean that knowledge of contraception should be withheld from minors and from the unmarried. But we believe that the community should be prepared to pay the cost of ensuring that what is offered is advice, and not merely the impersonal and commercial distribution of appliances. An unmarried girl of 17, whether in a factory or in a university, may arrive at a premeditated decision to sleep with her boyfriend. It is possible to disagree with her decision, but also to admit that there is a good social argument for enabling her to do so safely. But another girl's application, outwardly similar, might be seen by the trained observer to be not so much a demand for contraceptives as a cry for help in a confusing emotional crisis. Underneath a show of assurance, the same is often true of men, though the unsophisticated nature of male contraceptives at present means of course, that there is no 'point-of-sale' opportunity to meet any underlying problem. The slot machine cannot diagnose.

The giving of advice in the circumstances just envisaged is no easy matter. The setting up of advice centres for the unmarried (already done in some universities, and in London, if not elsewhere) could be open to some of the same objections as those urged against the installation of slot machines. Everything depends on the quality of the advice given. Obviously any attempt to

force moral decisions on clients would defeat its own end, but Christians working in advice centres would be under obligation to share such insights and convictions as had come to them through their experience of life.

But this is to dodge entirely the whole problem of abortion.

So far as abortion is concerned, we do not think it falls within the scope of this Report to deal at length with what is an extremely complex issue. The Church of England Board for Social Responsibility published a report on the subject, while we ourselves were sitting, and various church bodies have expressed their views about proposals for amending the law. We ourselves would like to see abortion freed from many of the present legal restrictions. (Incidentally we believe that the Government should be prepared to find more parliamentary time for bringing the law which affects sexual conduct into line with informed contemporary opinion.) But any relaxation of the law would need to be accompanied by much more resolute attempts to improve the general attitude to sex, contraception and parenthood. It is only along these lines that there can be any real hope of mitigating the problem of abortion.

You have certainly gone out of your way to emphasise the importance of sex, but surely sexual love-making is an art that has to be learnt. Many marriages are ruined by clumsiness and inexperience in this field; the initial shock sets up tensions that may never be removed. It is really irresponsible to come to marriage as a virgin. Moreover, since some marriages are ruined by physical incompatibility, isn't it much better to experiment by having intercourse prior to marriage so that any such incompatibility can be detected beforehand?

Sexual love-making is undoubtedly an art that has to be learnt though individuals vary enormously in their capacity to learn. Some married couples say it took them years to achieve anything like a satisfactory experience of intercourse. So they certainly would have had an unduly prolonged courtship if they had waited to be married until they had been completely assured of success. The fact is that almost always a mutually satisfying

sexual relationship depends upon a personal bond between the partners, one essential element of which is the irrevocable committal of each to the other. Where intercourse is undertaken to 'try out' the partner and decide whether he or she is suitable this essential condition is lacking. Such intercourse could well be unsatisfactory and prove not a preparation for marriage, but a reason—usually quite inadequate—for calling it off.

What would your judgment be, then, on hard cases? Take the case of a woman married to a latently homosexual or near-impotent husband, whose children she has nevertheless borne and for whom she feels affection; or the case of a young man too anxious about his own potency to make satisfactory relationships with girls. That woman may need to find occasional satisfaction, without complications, outside marriage. That man may need the temporary help and sexual welcome of an understanding woman. Surely it is in everyone's interest that they should find what they are looking for?

We have encountered similar cases and do not feel called upon to judge people in such desperate circumstances who found that their problems were eased in the ways suggested. But such cases are hardly typical. What we said earlier about the uncertain effect of intercourse applies here also. The phrase 'without complications' overlooks the fact that intercourse can lead to all sorts of complications.

Would you then give your views about the many cases that are typical—the various types of older unmarried people? There are men and women with no prospects. If it is accepted that all adults have, in varying degrees, basic psychological and physical needs based on their sexuality, what about the men, and more particularly the women, who would like to be married, but who are never likely to have the chance? Many of these remain unfulfilled and frustrated, and some of them seek solace in masturbation though this may induce in them a feeling of guilt. Those who have been widowed or divorced may find themselves in a similar situation. If an occasional act of intercourse brings renewal of confidence and belief in themselves, is this to be condemned?

The situation of the unmarried has been constantly in our mind during our discussions. We believe that it has been vastly neglected. Even some of those who are very willing to talk about sex and marriage, often are very unwilling to consider openly the problems of the single person. Similarly, the word masturbation was just about the last to be brought out of the shadowy cupboard in which once our sexual vocabulary was confined. Immense mischief has been done by grossly over-emphasizing the harm done by masturbation. It is not at all clear to us that any harm need be done when it is used, in the absence of other means, as a relief of physical tensions. But as the rest of our document shows, sexual self-expression is properly understood as part of a total encounter between persons, and masturbation can therefore never be more than an impoverished and incomplete substitute for the real thing.

More and more in our society, marriage and sexual fulfilment are coming to be regarded as the norm, and people who depart from it as pitiable. It does need to be said that many single people live a full and happy life, and are, in fact, able to fulfil themselves in ways which are scarcely possible for those who carry the responsibilities of marriage and family. We would not wish to underrate their difficulties, but in a great many of cases of those who remain reluctantly unmarried, we think 'an occasional act of intercourse' is likely to create more problems than it solves because, as we understand it, intercourse is not an activity which can be satisfactorily isolated from its context of a sustained relationship.

It does look, however, as though the practice of sexual intercourse before marriage, already very widespread, is likely to become almost universal. Surely it is unlikely that the Church, which has, however tardily, adapted itself to new situations in the past, will find it impossible to accommodate its teaching to this pattern of behaviour?

It is always chancy to forecast what the future pattern of human behaviour will be. We certainly do not take the view that the guidance offered by the Church must remain fixed and unalterable. We do not know what Christians will be saying

in fifty years time, or even twenty. It will partly depend on the circumstances. We see the task of the Church in terms of interpretation rather than accommodation—that is, not mere acceptance of whatever happens at the moment to be 'the done thing', but a continuing attempt to understand the causes, draw out the implications, and influence the development of the community's practice.

But it is precisely in this matter of interpretation that the Church today seems to be a babel of conflicting voices. The ecumenical movement itself has not only enabled the members of various Christian confessions to know one another better, but also to discover that the plurality of opinion and practice within our society is matched by a similar plurality within the Christian Community. The present ferment of discussion and publication has flowed a long way past any remaining ecclesiastical enclaves which are convinced that the whole truth about the Gospel is contained in their own formulations. At the same time it has made any demands for assured clear-cut and universalized guidance, whether in questions of faith or conduct, difficult to satisfy.

We ourselves welcome the ferment of thought and discussion which on some subjects—contraception, for example—does seem to be bringing different Christian traditions to a measure of agreement which ten years ago looked exceedingly remote. In fact the position is not as confused as has been suggested. The members of our Working Party come from various denominational backgrounds, though we have not often been conscious of them either in our agreements or in our disagreements. We believe that enough positive insights into the meaning and significance of sex have emerged from our discussions for us to feel that the guidance we offer, even if not 'clearcut and universalized', does in some sense indicate the thinking of the Church.

But you will surely agree that in one important matter you are out of step with the main body of Christian judgment, namely in your refusal to endorse the view that chastity consists in obedience to an invariable rule which forbids sexual intercourse outside marriage.

It may be so, but we do not wish our position to be misrepresented. We have not said that all rules are valueless. We have tried to show that rules by themselves are an inadequate basis for morality. No rule can cover all the varied and complex situations in which men and women find themselves. Moreover, an action which is in outward conformity with a rule may none-the-less be immoral because the motive and spirit behind it are wrong. Our reluctance to spell out the meaning of chastity in terms of basic rules is not due to any lack of conviction about the value of chastity, but rather to a desire to give adequate content to the word.

7

THE CULTURAL TASK

WE have argued that Christianity does not offer a closed system of moral rules embodying the divine will for man applicable to all times and places and perceived by men as a Natural Law. If this were so the educational task would, from one point of view be relatively straightforward: to persuade men by earnest and sustained exhortations to embrace these self-evident truths and to act upon them. Anyone who has read the forgoing pages, however, will have come to realize (if he did not already) that the matter is not so simple. Indeed the thinking of our group has been so far removed from this as to challenge the idea that there is a 'Christian position' at all; individuals and groups of Christians may hold different convictions which may be called 'positions', but the Christian faith is not so much concerned to tie men and women to a single fixed position on sexual morality as to commend a characteristic attitude to persons. Under what conditions, then, can this characteristic attitude be found? Can it be commended to all? If so, what part has it to play in the formal education of each generation?

The development of moral values

Chapter IV of our document contains both biological and psychological accounts of human sexuality. There is, however, a third way of looking at the subject which is especially relevant to the task (laid upon us by our terms of reference) of indicating how the Christian view of sex should be commended to the community at large, and to young people in particular. This is the way mapped out by sociologists and anthropologists, who in recent years have taught us never to think of man in isolation from his fellows. An individual only reaches adulthood through a complex process of learning called 'socialization'.

Unlike the lower animals, man's drives are not met by 'programmed' responses, uniform throughout the species. For man, instinct is not enough. A child brought up until the age of six in a dark attic with the bare minimum of attention needed to sustain life cannot feed or clean itself, talk to a visitor, nor even respond by a contraction of the facial muscles. A child socialized by wolves, as actual examples have shown, thinks and behaves very like a wolf. A child socialized by human beings develops his potential through love, play, friendship, work and appreciation. Hence it is not possible, anthropologists tell us, to find evidence of pre-cultural man.

This does not exclude the influence of individuals in challenging or developing the accepted standards; on the contrary, provided the basic moral axioms of co-operation, on which society depends, are not threatened, it is often the disturbed or eccentric—a Blake or a Beethoven—whose conscience and imagination preserve their contemporaries from pre-set responses to their environment. 'Men cannot live', writes Sir Isaiah Berlin, 'without seeking to describe or explain the universe to themselves. The models they use in doing so must deeply affect their lives.'[1] So too the Christian Church, which Harvey Cox calls 'God's *avant-garde*', may perhaps be seen as a 2,000-year experiment in personal relationships and 'model-making' where men can deepen their humanity by living together in the culture of Jesus Christ.

These then are the conditions within which the characteristic Christian attitudes of which we have spoken are to be found. For the Christian, morality is to be worked out in the ambience of faith. But this does not mean that believers have access to a body of esoteric moral knowledge not available for outside inspection. Any attitude which emerges from the living experience of a Christian community is, we believe, worthy of consideration on its merits.

But how can such an attitude be commended through education, formal or informal, at school or at home? In recent years, a new approach to the moral development of children has been gathering strength among educationalists. The Swiss educational

[1] Observer, 4.11.62.

psychologist Jean Piaget delineates three stages of growth in intellectual and moral perception, through which children pass on the way to maturity: the 'motor' stage where behaviour is primarily dictated by the need to eat, take exercise and excrete; the 'egocentric' stage where the child experiences the world as an extension of himself; and the stage of 'reciprocity' in which co-operation with others forms the foundation of his personality. The moral development of the infant really begins when his motor activities are restrained or encouraged by his parents in toilet training.

Young Children–Home and School

The most significant thing in an infant's life is his relationship to a person, and at the motor stage kisses and frowns direct his development. Not surprisingly, there follows the egocentric stage where what is 'right' and 'wrong' for the child is entirely dependent on the wishes of his elders. (Hence the importance of consistency in dealing even with the youngest children.) At this stage any act which shows obedience to a rule is 'good'. Moral commands—truth-telling, for example—remain external to him. He accepts them, as he accepts the weather and the size of his nursery; they are 'world-order' decrees.

Parental responsibility at this stage is naturally crucial, and teachers in infant and junior schools often say that the moral education they attempt is frustrated by the inadequacies of parents who are themselves in need of training and help. Dr Spock may have become the middle class parent's *vade mecum*, but very many young adults in the wider community have themselves never been taught how children develop and what their responsibility is, how to distinguish between lies at the age of four and lies at the age of ten, what a seven-year old may be expected to understand about his body and what he may not. Even where love is present, a parent's moral whimsicality or emotional insensitivity can dull the interest and frustrate the development of a child's personality; and where love is fitful—and children are frozen out of emotional encounters—the outcome is often an adult whose sexuality, when it emerges, is offered as an IOU in a transaction not backed by any emotional capital.

Educationalists talk these days of 'subject readiness', a phrase to denote the moment in the maturation process when a child can deal with a particular fact or principle. If it comes too late, the opportunity may be lost, if too early the knowledge will not be absorbed and may even generate hostility. But the idea of readiness does not mean that the parent or teacher sits back passively to wait for the right moment. A wise parent or teacher will see the need for establishing a dialogue with his children so that he can anticipate the next stage and provide appropriate experience and information to facilitate development, keeping an eye to the future adult world into which the child will be moving. Within this dialogue the child can be helped to interpret the world of things and persons including himself and his own bodily structure. Many parents shirk their responsibility to answer seriously the questions about birth and the function of sexual organs which young children usually ask about when around three or four years old. Children are deeply sensitive to atmosphere and to emotional strain in adults; parents who hush their children up in embarrassment or who give fairy-tale answers risk estrangement of which a common later symptom is the parent who says, 'my children don't seem interested in sex'. But quite apart from estrangement mis-information can lead to unhealthy emotional development. The Schofield Report contains an analysis of how nearly 2,000 boys and girls first found out about 'the facts of life', and shows that most boys and girls learn about conception from their friends, usually through jokes. Just over a quarter of the girls obtained this information from their mothers; after that teachers are the most frequent source. Only 7 per cent of the boys learned about conception from their fathers and 4 per cent from their mothers. For boys, after friends, teachers are the most usual source of information. Books play a minor rôle: only 7 per cent of boys and 3 per cent of girls learned first about conception from books.

One of the difficulties here is vocabulary. There are several excellent little books available for those who do read books, but our language in this respect is usually and significantly deficient. It offers lovers, parents and teachers a choice between a set of Anglo-Saxon terms whose associations and overtones

are lavatorial and contemptuous, and a set of medical terms which are too clinical for some contexts, and which are also unfamiliar to large sections of the population. Confronted by this choice, many families take refuge in private terms which are liable later on to cause their children embarrassment, if not confusion. We think children ought to be taught the right term as soon as they are curious to know it. What is the 'right term'? D. H. Lawrence in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and more recently Mr Wayland Young in *Eros Denied*, attempted to rehabilitate the four and five letter words, and if we thought that the attempts were capable of succeeding we would endorse them. But as far as we can foresee, national self-consciousness will be too strong for the reformers and the educational task is too urgent to wait. Through schools, and the films shown at schools, the neutral terms like 'penis', 'vagina', and 'ejaculation' are becoming more generally acceptable, and ought eventually to take their place along with the universal vernacular which may, or may not, soon go up in the world far enough to be heard from a television set without remark.

In this cultural climate it is not altogether surprising that we are not so far ahead as some other countries in working out adequate methods of sex instruction. A book on sex instruction used in Swedish schools, published by the Royal Board of Education in Sweden, available in an English translation as *Handbook of Sex Instruction in Swedish Schools*, explains in some detail one way in which this information can be presented. Sex instruction at school is compulsory in Sweden and the infant teacher is expected to embark on the first stage of a graded course during the early part of the child's first term. The subjects covered are:

(*a*) How the sexes differ

(*b*) Where children come from and how they develop before they are born

(*c*) How children are born

(*d*) How children depend upon their mothers and fathers and homes.

Item (*d*) reveals that this course is no mere recitation of 'the facts of life'. The general line taken is more conservative than might be expected by people who have absorbed the popular stereotype of Swedish society:

> Sex instruction must give young people a clear understanding of the obligations which accompany sexual relations between man and woman. It is necessary to bring the understanding home that these are not just a personal matter between a man and a woman, but that they have consequences—especially for any children—and are in general a social matter of great importance. Young people must be shown that it is their parents and often society too that have to bear the economic and other consequences of their engaging in sexual relations while they are still growing up. The danger of separating sexual desire from love should be stated, and the fact that sex can never give any real satisfaction without an emotional attachment to the partner.[1]

The handbook says precisely what is within the child's range at each stage, indicates how it should be taught and what attitudes commended, illustrating this by lively specimen lessons. But the practical question still arises: who is to give this instruction in our own primary schools? In the infant school there is really no choice. One teacher is with the children the whole time and the introduction of another would almost certainly create more problems than it would solve. If this sort of instruction is to become part of our educational pattern as we believe it should, teacher training colleges will have to take it into account, and perhaps ask themselves whether students who after advice still feel unable to face this task should be teaching this inquisitive age group at all. Older teachers already in the schools might well find it harder to adapt, and this is perhaps a further reason for hoping that the current campaign for the return of married women to teaching proves effective.

Adolescents–Home, Mass Media, School

Among young children such group feeling as exists is not autonomous. It is, in Piaget's phrase, 'a communion of submission to elders'. Older groups present an entirely different picture.

[1] P. 12 (1957 edition).

Here is an organised society based on a feeling of equality and mutual respect, with division of labour and reciprocal roles. Lies and cheating within the group are banned. Rules become a community product forged out of the free exchange of ideas which gradually replaces external discipline. These principles of co-operation, if all goes well, become internal to the individual, a permanant part of his personality.

Parents of the teen-age children are notoriously harassed. There are inevitable tensions and sometimes rebellion. If neither parents nor child know what is happening, and especially if there is absence of mutual respect, lasting estrangement may result. But in a home marked by affection, the young person may grow in self-understanding and moral dependability. Schools should not avoid their responsibilities at this time; the problem is very much an educational one. Many homes do not know how to tackle it and their difficulties are exacerbated if they have not talked about sex earlier on. Nevertheless, such homes may have already established the basic attitudes necessary for happy personal relationships. If nothing of this has been done, all that will be possible may be re-education of attitudes, or what in other contexts would be called 'remedial work'.

Adolescence is a time of anxiety and emotional uncertainty. Harold Loukes has said:

> These are the years when quite normal youngsters begin to think about suicide, or have violent religious conversions, or cannot think about work or domestic routine, have moments of intolerable rudeness, become insufferably touchy; if they are girls, write to teenage journals, develop passionate friendships, cease communication with their parents about all but the most trivial matters.[1]

He goes on to make the point that one of the main factors which would seem to contribute to the turbulence of the teenage years is the 'indeterminacy of the roles' which the adolescent is expected to play. Our modern urbanized society is a complex network of overlapping sub-groups, or sub-cultures, each with

[1] In a lecture on 'Responsibility and Irresponsibility in Adolescents' (1962).

its own loyalties and value systems. The adolescent is socialized into uncertainty by the wide range and subtle variety of parts he is called on to assume, often simultaneously, at a time when he is not experienced enough or independent enough to play any of the roles successfully. It is hardly surprising that an adolescent should be vulnerable to a greater or lesser extent to a teen-age sub-culture which helps to achieve a temporary release from the day-to-day ambiguities of his ordinary life. The Schofield Report comments:

> Within these urban conditions has grown up the teenage mythology, built up by the press, the advertisers and the special teenage pop music magazines. This has created an image of how the teenager is supposed to behave. Here is an organised system of behaviour expectations and attitudes, and the young person acts out his role, largely learnt from the teenage group to which he belongs. . . Yet it is obvious that this teenage sub-culture has been created by the adult world, not by the young people themselves.[1]

The effect of the mass media—press, advertising, films, television, radio—on the maturation of young people is a subject about which little is known, though much said. The more official research that can be done into it the better, though there is a methodological difficulty inherent in examining the effects of a phenomenon to which everybody (in advanced societies) is exposed. Without controls to study along with his chosen sample, the scientific researcher may not always outshine an intelligent guesser. Without doubt, many young people develop a healthy resistance to advertising and enjoy the allurements of the mass media—the James Bond films, for instance—in a way which does not blunt their moral reactions to the real world. There are signs, however, that the artificial sub-culture set up for teenagers creates for some an alternative world where maturity is delayed and personal relationships kept impermanent and superficial. It is of course true that when teenagers are disturbed, the causes may lie far back in infancy. But the actual pattern which the disturbance takes is created by the situation in which the adolescent finds himself, and purveyors of 'popular

[1] Michael Schofield *The Sexual Behaviour of Young People* (Longmans 1965).

culture' cannot avoid responsibility which we all share. We all live in a society which finds teen-age labour economically useful, and we should be most reluctant to accept the kind of legislative controls which would be necessary if the labourers were to be shielded from all types of commercial exploitation.

It cannot be denied, however, that the culture in which contemporary adolescents grow up sets the teacher responsible for their moral education new and severe problems, quite apart from the fact that adolescents are already reluctant to accept imposed moral values and are developing, although clumsily, the 'internalised' norms which characterize the adult person. Of course, the school community as a whole is involved in 'education for personal relationships' and every teacher is thus responsible for moral education. But this is not a sufficient solution. Tackling the specific question of sex instruction the Newsom Report says:

> A hundred years ago nearly all good men would normally have given the same answers to the problems which beset the young immediately in their conception of the marriage relation. Today . . . it would be stupid to deny that there are profound differences in society about pre-marital intercourse and about the permanence of marriage, or that these must be reflected in many staff rooms. Tensions there must be if the questions of boys and girls are heard and answered and not suppressed—tensions, perhaps, within the staff of a school and tensions between school and home. We can only say that we believe it to be wrong to leave the young to fend for themselves without guidance, and wrong to conceal from them (as if we could) the differences on this issue, which separate men and women of real moral sensitivity.[1]

We would endorse this. A new, more objective approach is needed in our schools which still have no official place for the communication of that increasing body of knowledge relating to personal relationships, some of it psychological, some sociological, some philosophical and ethical. We would recommend that specific courses on human relations should become part of the curriculum of all schools, introduced at appropriate

[1] *Half Our Future* (HMSO 1963), para. 164.

points up to Sixth Form level. It is our firm belief that sex instruction should be given within such a context.

It is important that more detailed instruction on sexual matters should precede puberty. Physical maturity often comes to the young person unexplained and can cause shock, and even fear. This means that we must recognise the need for teachers who are prepared to tackle this task in junior as well as secondary schools. Clearly careful selection and training are essential requirements for this job. We would like to see University Institutes of Education providing courses on human relations which seconded teachers could pursue, perhaps for a recognised qualification. Some schools are already experimenting with courses on personal relationships, and supplement their staff with outside speakers who may be doctors or social workers, or perhaps a housewife who is gifted with young people. This can be a very useful idea at, say fifth form level, as adolescents are often more ready to talk to an outside person than to teachers who have access to their record cards. But the ultimate responsibility must remain with the school.

What of the R.I. specialist in schools? For the teacher whose methods are sufficiently flexible the periods of religious instruction required by the 1944 Education Act could provide an excellent opportunity for co-operation with colleagues teaching personal relations by setting ethical instruction in a religious context of discussion about the nature of man and his ultimate destiny. There is already growing support for this kind of 'open end' approach from teachers of religious knowledge themselves, though a recently published conference report[1] suggests that if religious instruction is to be tackled in this way a fresh look will need to be taken at the training received by specialists in schools. (The linguistic emphasis of much theological training does not prepare a teacher for the cut and thrust of a school leavers form in a London comprehensive school.) We welcome the trend in Universities and Colleges of Education in extending the opportunities for the study of Christian Ethics and the Philosophy of Religion and we also feel that the specialist in

[1] *Religious Education 1944-1984* (Allen and Unwin 1966).

religious education should receive some training in the social sciences over and above that already provided for the training of teachers in other subjects.

It may be unwise to single out other subjects which have special relevance for a human relations course, but perhaps the arts have the most relevance to sex education. Painting and sculpture show the human body as something other than the exaggerated symbol of the 'girlie' magazine. Drama and poetry offer a language for inarticulate feeling which actually extends and deepens the range of feeling itself. Novels can provide experience by proxy—then the full depth of George Eliot, Thackeray, Dickens, Jane Austen, Hardy, D. H. Lawrence may be less immediate in impact than, say, Stan Barstow's *A Kind of Loving*, which, whether as a book or a film, cannot fail to make the 17-year-old aware of certain consequences of one kind of loving.

Further Education

The educational approach to adolescents who have left school but who come together at youth clubs is one of stimulating discussion which will get them to educate each other. The National Marriage Guidance Council has shown what is possible in this direction. The following is part of an account of the group method in action:

> In a mixed group you can get the sudden magnificent explosion which typifies all we are trying to do—the boy who shouts us all down: 'It's all very well, but when a girl comes along with her skirt up to here and her neck down to here, she's only after one thing'. And the girls shout back at him: 'It isn't true. She dresses like that because she thinks she looks better'. 'Rubbish', says the boy, 'she just wants sex'. 'No, she doesn't she wants love. She may be trying to get it the wrong way, but she wants someone to love her. She wants a husband, and a home and probably kids'. 'Then why does she dress like that? I wouldn't marry a girl like that.' 'She doesn't know she's doing it to you, that's why!'
>
> The ideal thing has happened—the leader can sit back and watch it happening; the group working under its own steam, doing its own educating, the boy convinced as he could never have been by the leader that girls do react differently, the girls learning

something vital about the much more quickly triggered responses of the boy. It happens over the 64,000 dollar question too. 'Is it wrong to have sex before marriage?' The old way—my old way ten or twelve years ago—would have been to say 'Yes, of course,' and then go on with a carefully marshalled list of arguments to prove it. Now I probably throw the question back—not from laziness or lack of conviction, but because I have proved it to work far better. 'What do you think?' Some of them produce the classical answers about VD or unwanted babies, and you spend some time talking about these. They begin by thinking about 'disgrace', trouble to parents, forced marriages, money difficulties —but eventually someone points out that the baby has some rights in the matter too. 'Well, if you didn't have a baby, would it be all right then?' A furious argument breaks out about this and you let it rage, then say: 'What *is* wrong? Is it something that hurts someone else, or hurts your idea of yourself, or what?'

It is at this point that those of us with Christian convictions have to be careful. For with most groups of this sort you can't bring God into it, or sin, or morality. They have no picture of God or of sin, though they may have their own morality. The discussion may end with someone saying 'Well, you said sex was different for the girl; she doesn't want it for itself, she wants a home and kids. Well, she won't feel it's right will she, without that?' 'Do you think that marriage is important then? What do you mean by marriage?' 'Well, it's for keeps; it's for a home, for kids. It's meant to last.' 'To last? But suppose people get tired of each other?'

You worry it through watching the adolescent sex war ('men are all out for what they can get') breaking down, the emergence of a picture of a loving relationship which holds, and is held by, sex within it, but which is capable of spreading far beyond sex alone. Then they may turn back on you again because you still haven't told them what you think about sex before marriage. . . So you tell them, but 'Why do you want to know? You aren't going to act by what I think—in the end you have to make up your own minds.' And you see them thinking, 'That's right'.

There is no doubt that such a technique requires very great skill and experience. The personality of the group leader is very important; he must be unobtrusive yet firmly 'in charge'.

The involvement of the Churches in marrying men and women means that there is an inescapable obligation to provide adequate training for those who marry, and help and counsel for those who encounter marriage difficulties. Preparation for this essential pastoral ministry must be given a more adequate place on the syllabuses of theological colleges.

The local church has an important part to play in supporting all those activities within its district which help men and women to be truly human. Clearly the Church in every place should contribute powerfully to the development of moral values. Large numbers of parents and children come under the influence of the Church, especially at formative stages such as baptism and marriage. It is essential for lay leaders, as well as clergy, to be balanced, informed people who are prepared to refresh their minds on the changing problems of human relations in the societies they serve. What is expected of teachers responsible for human relations courses should be expected of the leaders of every local church. This point needs to be borne in mind in the development of lay training schemes by the Churches.

Apart from the pastoral responsibility of the local church for its children, young people and parents, there is its local responsibility for the community. There we would make a practical suggestion that local Councils of Churches should act as a co-ordinating body to bring together all who have a special concern or responsibility for personal activities. It is in our view vital that marriage guidance counsellors, Family Planning Association workers, doctors, social workers, teachers, youth leaders, children's officers, probation officers, Christian leaders (including clergy) etc. should meet periodically to consider the problems of guiding human relations in the community. The holding of 'Home and Community Weeks' from time to time can be a useful means of reaching the various sections of the community and stirring up interest on important questions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that:

1. Courses on human relations should become part of the curriculum of all schools, and developed at appropriate points up to and including the sixth form. (p. 72 f.)

2. University Institutes of Education should provide courses on human relations which seconded teachers could pursue, perhaps for a recognized qualification. (p. 73)

3. Courses for teachers specialising in Religious Instruction should include training in social science, psychology, and human relations. (p. 73 f.)

4. Churches should ensure that ministers and clergy receive adequate training in all aspects of relationships—especially in the art of preparing couples for marriage and helping those faced with marriage difficulties. (p. 76)

5. Local Councils of Churches should, where necessary, take the initiative in bringing together those who are concerned with personal relations. (p. 76)

6. The Government should make itself responsible for continuing and co-ordinated research into the effects of the mass media on the maturation of young people. (p. 71)

7. The Government should be prepared to find more parliamentary time for bringing the law which affects sexual conduct into line with informed contemporary opinion. (p. 59)

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The teaching of the Christian Church that sexual intercourse should be confined to marriage is frequently attacked as a theory, and ignored in practice.
A Working Party was therefore appointed by the British Council of Churches in order to study the Christian position today. Their report frankly describes the current diversity of moral opinion, explores the meaning of sex in the light of modern knowledge before relating Christian insights to possible criticism. Finally it grasps the practical questions involved in the educational task.

We plan to publish shortly *Living with Sex: The Student's Dilemma* **by Richard F. Hettlinger (12s 6d);** *Sex and Christian Freedom: An Enquiry* **by Leonard Hodgson (9s 6d); and, for teenagers and their teachers,** *Young People and Sex* **by Julia Dawkins.**

Third impression